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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE



STORIES by

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THE ARMY COMES TO VENUS

A New Novelet by
ERIC FRANK
RUSSELL

SPECIMEN

LECTURER AFTER LECTURER, back at Inter-Galactic's Space Academy, had warned them that they shouldn't take for granted that any Intelligences they'd meet on the Outer Planets would necessarily be humanoid.

But this was such nonsense. Look at Venus, for instance! Everybody knew how there'd been all that rubbish talked about the strange fish-like beings that would be found on Venus, and then, when we'd gotten there, we'd found a tall and golden-haired people, just like us. Well, like some of us. . . . And look at all the nonsense that'd been written about the Martians, ever since the days of old H. G. Wells and the so-called science-fiction writers of the last century, who'd all insisted the Martians would be spider-like things. Somebody had even written a story about the spider-men of Mars, living deep down in the caves of the dead planets, coming out only on the Holy Days to sing together, by the canals, about the old days when Mars had been great. . . .

Chuck Reynolds *knew* it was stuff and nonsense. So did Dave Leigh, Norman Kent, and the others who'd be going out on field trips once they landed. Beta VII was, according to earlier surveys, one of the dead planets. Back in the beginning of Time, man had perhaps walked on Beta VII. But then something had happened, perhaps the same something that had almost destroyed life on Mars and driven the tall and graceful Martians into the Inner Cities.

They had an easy landing. This was Dombrowski's ninth flight with the *Queen Maude*. Both ship and flight engineer understood each other thoroughly by now.

Captain Horton called them together in the briefing room the next morning. Dunninger, who had a degree from Oaxa School of Mines, told them again what they were to look for. Anything Inter-Galactic Development might be interested in. And then they were on their own.

Somebody had said the soil of Beta VII was rocky. That was the understatement of the ages. It was all stones, millions of them, as far as you could see. Millions and millions of stones, small stones and slightly larger stones, all of them looking as if the winds had been polishing them and as if the sun above had been bleaching them for thousands and thousands of years.

It was rough going those first hours until they were out of sight of the ship. Extremely rough going. . . .

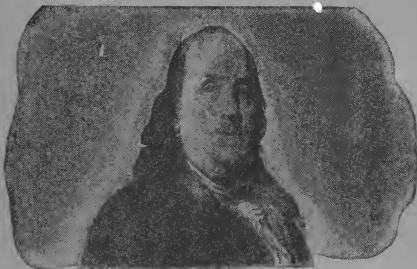
Suddenly Reynolds thought he saw a shadow, a huge shadow, in front of him. He knew this was impossible. But then he heard the others shout. And he looked up.

It was standing there, almost on top of the two men in the rear—an incredible giant Thing out of a Horror Tri-Di. A claw, as large as any of them, was reaching out for Kent.

Reynolds thought he could see an eye looking down on him, a quizzical, gently curious eye.

And then the claw was nearer. . . .

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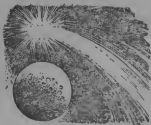
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FU 93

the
army
comes
to
venus

by . . . Eric Frank Russell

He was secretly surprised
to find himself enjoying
this spell of gallantry.
But worse was to happen.

IN THICK, cloying mist the ship moaned like a tormented ghost of monstrous size. It descended slowly, warily, feeling with invisible electronic fingers for a place in which to sit.

Those below stood gazing up into the fog, not sensing the probing ray, seeing nothing. A bunch of hard-bitten, bearded men in oiled slickers down which moisture trickled in thin streams.

After a little while the fog appeared to solidify into an enormous wet cylinder with a steaming end. The ship came down, touched, settled. A sluggish wave of damp earth hunched itself on either side of the curved hull.

Airlocks opened, duralumin gangways slid forth. The bearded ones clustered closer, avid for new faces. A shock-haired, red-whiskered man was the first to emerge, staggering under the weight of numerous bags and packs, carefully feeling his way down the metal steps.

Somebody at the back of the waiting audience let go a yell of welcome. "Old Firelip, as I live and breathe!"

Two-three days after we had commented on Eric Frank Russell's fast moving recent novel, THE SPACE WILLIES (Ace Double Novels, 35 cents) this lovely novelet was submitted by his agents. This story, we hasten to add, is not space opera (like TSW). It is simply a credible story of life in a mining town on Venus, and what eventually happens to some of those who live there.

Pausing halfway down the gangway, the newcomer screwed up rheumy eyes as he sought to identify the shouter. "Duckass, no less! What made the parole board let *you* out?"

Listeners grinned, immediately accepting the new arrival as one of themselves. He had the two best qualifications, namely, a ready tongue and a friend in the attending mob.

A fat man came next, waddling down and letting his bags go bump-bump-bump from step to step as he dragged them behind. He wore three chins and an expression of moony amiability.

"Lookie, lookie, lookie, here comes Cookie," invited a brawny roughneck.

The others chuckled. The fat man stopped, studied the other, spoke in high-pitched but undisturbed tones. "You must have second sight, chum. A cook is just what I am."

"Then my belly says you're two years overdue. The few gals we've got here can do everything but cook."

"Everything?" asked the fat man with pointed interest.

"You try 'em sometime."

"Maybe I will." He lumbered the rest of the way down, his kit still bumping. Anything breakable in his bags was having a run of hard luck.

A dozen nondescripts followed, all heavily burdened with everything, but the farmhouse roof. Pio-

neers bearing their tiny personal worlds on their backs.

Several ship's officers and a few of the crew came out for a gossip, a sniff of moist air, a stamp around on real, solid ground. After them followed a string of people who looked like nobody in particular and wanted to stay that way. A few had the air of still trying to thwart the systematic circulation of police photographs.

"Where's the molar mauler?" bawled an onlooker with a lopsided face.

"Me," responded a white-haired ancient, trying to lug four boxes at once.

Gumboil grabbed two of them. "Good thing you've come, Pop. You've got a customer right now. One more day and I'd be off my nut."

They moved toward the nearby shanty town. The rest of the crowd remained to watch the ship; they were bored by frontier solitude and thankful for a petty event.

A person who oozed officialdom showed himself at the airlock, stared out with cold authority. Characteristically, they bristled at the sight of him. He went inside and did not reappear. It wasn't six months since they had pulled a would-be tax collector to pieces.

Several sluggards emerged, one dragging a pack resembling a tightly wrapped haystack. Half a dozen witnesses helped get it down amid a shower of wisecracks concerning weak bladders and portable

comfort stations. The owner registered acute embarrassment.

Two girls came from the airlock, suddenly silencing the wits. They were full-lipped, full-busted, had brilliant eyes and emphatic hips. Both were bottle-blondes. A distinct sigh of gratification ran through the audience. The girls put on knowing smirks, revealed white teeth. They tripped down the gangway with dainty steps and beckoning backsides. Four of the crew toted their bags, surrendered them to eager helpers.

"Annie's place?"

The girls nodded, giggled, weighed up the hungry clientele. Two barrel-chested men indulged in an acrimonious shoving match for the right to carry a bag on which both had laid hands simultaneously. They solved the problem by bearing it between them, giving alternate tugs to tear it from each other at every tenth step.

Came a pause while the cargo-hatch opened, a long-armed crane swung out, began to lower boxes and crates. A few of the crowd shifted position to get a better view of the unloading.

Another girl appeared, accompanied by a ship's officer. She was vastly different from her bosomy predecessors: small, slender, oval-faced and cool. Her black hair was natural, her equally black eyes not glassy, her expression slightly wistful instead of hard and brassy. Carefully the officer helped her

down the steps, shook hands with her at the bottom.

"G'wan, kiss her, you dummy," advised a hoarse voice.

"Sailors don't care," commented another.

"Love 'em and leave 'em," added a third.

For a moment the officer looked as if he would like to make something of it. He hesitated, glowered at the ribald crowd to their immense satisfaction. Then he whispered anxiously to the girl, apparently questioning the wisdom of her remaining alone on this world. She smiled at him, shook her head.

"Not tonight, Cuthbert," jeered an onlooking tough.

"You've had your share," urged another. "Don't be greedy."

"Give real men a chance," suggested somebody else.

Several chortled at that sally, their tones loud and coarse. One smacked his lips in exaggerated anticipation. The officer lingered awhile, reluctant to go, but finally mounted the gangway and went into the ship. His expression was worried.

Left to herself, the girl surveyed the hairy mob with calm self-possession. They returned the compliment, taking in her slender legs, narrow hips, dark hair. They undressed her with their eyes and liked what they saw.

"You doing anything tonight, Honey-babe?" inquired a bear disguised as a man.

"You wait your turn, Bulstrode," ordered a scar-faced neighbor. He spat on thick, calloused fingers, combed his hair and straightened an invisible tie. "This one is for gentlemen only." He leered with undisguised appetite at the subject of his remarks. "Isn't that so, Luscious?"

"All men are gentlemen." She looked at Bulstrode with a kind of dark-eyed innocence. "When they wish to be."

Bulstrode's optics dulled and his huge fingers twitched while he digested this. It took him quite a time. When he spoke again it was with an apologetic rumble.

"I was only kidding, Ma'am. I sort of thought—"

"She isn't interested, you hairy ape," interjected Scarface. "So don't waste breath advertising your ignorance." He rubbed his bristly chin and gave another pull to the non-existent tie. "Can I carry your stuff to Annie's place, Lovebird?"

Shuffling slowly around on big, cumbersome feet, Bulstrode faced him and growled, "What makes you think she's heading for Annie's? Why, you slit-checked, ragged-eared louse!" Extending a spade-sized hand he spread it across the other's unhandsome features, curled his fingers and squeezed.

The victim gurgled convulsively behind the horny palm, made frantic pulls at the thick wrist, finally kicked him good and hard on the shin. It sounded like kicking a tree.

Taking no notice, Bulstrode began to twist the face leftward, bending him sidewise.

"Stop that," ordered the girl.

Still holding on, Bulstrode turned a surprised face over a massive shoulder. "Hey?"

"Stop it," she repeated. "You wouldn't behave that way in your own home."

Bulstrode removed his grip and started examining his hand as if he had never seen it before. His opponent made snuffing noises, voiced a lurid oath and let go a haymaker. The angry fist caught the big man smack on the chin, rattling his teeth but not knocking him down.

Sweeping a columnar arm around in the manner of one brushing away a persistent fly, Bulstrode pleaded, "Look, lady, just you go take a nice, quiet walk while I slaughter this jerk."

"Don't be silly." Her dark eyes reproved the pair of them. "You're like a couple of overgrown children. You don't even know what you're squabbling about—do you?"

They stared at her dully, not answering.

"Do you?" she insisted.

A tall, gray-haired individual spoke from the front rank of the vastly entertained audience. "You're not on the home planet now. This is Venus and don't you forget it. Terra never comes nearer than thirty million miles."

"Home is as near as your memory says it is," she contradicted.

"You may be right. But some of us haven't got so darned much worth remembering." He paused, finished without bitterness, "That's why we're here."

"Speak for yourself, Marsden," chipped in a squat, swarthy man standing behind him. "I'm here to make money and make it fast."

"I'm here because I love the sunshine," yelled a satirical voice from the rear.

Some laughed, some didn't. All glanced upward at the fog which permitted visibility to no more than two hundred feet. Once in a while it lifted to two thousand. Often it descended in a thick, cloying mass to ground level. Moisture condensed on their slickers and ran down in tiny rivulets. The girl's black hair sparkled with diamonds of wetness.

"If you're not going to Annie's," continued Marsden, "you'll have to find someplace else." A contemptuous sweep of his hand indicated her choice of six or seven hundred wooden shacks. "Take a look at what's on offer."

"No place for a girl like you," informed Bulstrode, trying to ingratiate himself and eyeing her like an elephant hoping for a cracker.

"Thank you, but I knew what to expect. I was well-primed in advance." She smiled at them. "So I brought my own home with me."

Turning away, she tripped light-footed toward the ship's tail-end where cargo was piling up as the long-armed crane swung to and fro.

Presently those on the ship dropped a ramp and rolled down it a small aluminum trailer with two wheels amidships.

"Oh, ye gods!" griped a snaggle-toothed onlooker, openly disappointed. "I'm the only guy on the planet with a pneumatic mattress. And what's it to her?"

"If they're going to start transporting them homes and all," complained another, "it'll be the beginning of the end. Before you know it, this town will become too big for its boots."

"Which town?" asked a third, gazing around and pretending to see nothing.

Marsden saw her at her door three days later. Leaning on one of the hardwood posts that somebody had driven in to mark the limits of her property, he let his calculating gaze rest on the trailer, decided that what hung behind the facing window were the first lace curtains he'd seen in many years.

"Getting settled down?"

"Yes, thank you. I've been very busy. Unpacking and sorting things out takes quite a time."

"I suppose so. Has nobody helped you?"

"I didn't need any help."

"You may want plenty before you're through." He tilted his hat backward, went on, "Anyone bothered you yet?"

"Dear me, no. Why should they?"

"This is a man's town."

Looking as if she hadn't the vaguest notion of what he meant, she said, "Then why don't they give it a name?"

"A name? What's the use of a name? It isn't enough of a dump to deserve one. Besides, it's the only settlement on Venus. There isn't any other—yet. Anyway, names cause arguments and arguments start fights."

"If they'll quarrel over the mere question of what to call this town it's evident that they haven't enough to do."

"When they're in the mood to let off steam they'll fight over anything. What else do you expect on the frontier?"

She did not answer.

"And they've plenty to keep them busy," he continued with a touch of harshness. "They're gnawing into a mountain of white granite that contains thirty pounds of niobium to the ton. It's mighty useful for high tensile and stainless steels. Also they're building a narrow-gauge railroad eastward to a deposit of pitchblende that makes a Geiger-counter chatter like a machine gun." He rubbed his lips with a thick and slightly dirty forefinger. "Yes, they work hard, swear hard, drink hard and fight hard."

"There are other things as much worth fighting for."

"Such as what?"

"This town, for instance."

"A cluster of tumbledown shanties. A haphazard array of smelly cabins. You call it a town?"

"It will be a real one some day."

"I can imagine," Marsden displayed a knowing grin. "Exactly as the boys would like it. Complete with city hall, police stations and a high-walled jail." He spat in the dirt to show what he thought of this prospect. "A good many of them came here to get away from all that. Do you know that at least forty per cent of them have served prison sentences?"

"I don't see that it matters much."

"Don't you?" He was slightly surprised. "Why not?"

"Men who are really evil prefer to take things easy."

"Meaning—?"

"Those who've seen fit to come this far must have done so to make a fresh start with a clean sheet. They'd be stupid to make a mess of their lives a second time."

"Some people are made that way," he informed.

"And some make them that way," she retorted.

"Oh, God, a reformer." He showed disgust. "What's your name?"

"Miranda Dean."

"Well, it could be worse."

"What d'you mean?"

"It could be Dolly Doberhorst."

"Who on earth is *she*?"

"An obese charmer round at Annie's." He studied her figure. "Some fellows like 'em fat. And some don't."

"Really?" She seemed quite unconscious of his meaning or of the

trace of appetite in his eyes. "I'd better carry on with more chores else they'll never be done. Pardon me, won't you?"

"Sure."

He watched her enter the trailer but did not continue on his way. He remained leaning on the post, picking his teeth with a thin stalk of grass and thinking that she'd be very much to his taste without her clothes. Yes, she'd be clean and wholesome, not painted and gross like the others. For a short time he continued to exercise his masculine privilege of pondering delightful possibilities until suddenly he became aware of a huge bulk looming at his side.

Bulstrode followed his gaze and challenged, "What's the idea, staring at her place like that? You thinking of busting in?"

"You wouldn't dream of it, of course?"

"No, I wouldn't."

"Don't give me that. Females are females. She's merely playing hard to get. And you're a liar, anyway."

"That's enough for me," said Bulstrode, speaking low in his chest. "Take off that coat so I can start mauling your meat."

"You'd better not get tough with me, Muscle-bound." Marsden protruded a pocket significantly. "Because."

"There now, you've got a gun. Isn't that nice?" Bulstrode shuffled around to face him. "Like to know something?"

"What?"

"I just don't give a damn."

With that he thrust out a hairy paw, arrested it halfway as Miranda Dean reappeared and came toward them. Lowering the paw, he tried to hide it in the manner of a kid caught fooling with a prohibited slingshot. Marsden relaxed, took his hand from his pocket.

Reaching them, she said brightly, "I thought you boys might appreciate these." Smiling at each in turn, she bestowed a couple of little black books and returned to her trailer.

Taking one look at what he'd got, Marsden groaned, "Holy Moses, a prayer-book."

"With hymns," confirmed Bulstrode on a note of complete incredulity.

"A religious nut," said Marsden. "I knew she'd have a flaw somewhere. Nobody's perfect."

"Hymns," repeated Bulstrode with the air of one whose idol has revealed feet of clay. His beefy features registered confusion.

"What a laugh," Marsden went on. "When Annie hears about this she'll roll all over the floor."

"It's no business of Annie's," asserted Bulstrode, feeling belligerent for no reason that he could understand.

Jerking an indicative thumb toward the trailer, Marsden opined, "It's going to be. Sooner or later she will make it Annie's business. I know that kind of crackpot. I've met 'em before. They can't leave well enough alone. Stick their noses

into everyone's affairs. They think it's their ordained mission in life to improve everything and everybody."

"Maybe some of us could do with it," Bulstrode suggested.

"Speak for yourself," advised Marsden scornfully. "A shave, a haircut and a bath and you'd rise almost to subhuman level." His tones hardened. "But this is a free world. Why should you wash or shave if you don't want to?"

"It's honest dirt," said Bulstrode, giving him a retaliatory stare. "Soap and water can take it off—which is more than it could do for your mind."

"Suffering saints, that holy tome must be working on you already. Throw it away before it takes hold."

He set the example by tossing his own book into a bank of tall weeds. Bulstrode promptly retrieved it.

"If we don't want them we ought to give them back to her. She may have paid good money for them."

"All right," said Marsden with malicious anticipation. "You go tell her to put them where the monkey put the nuts. I'll stay here and watch the fun."

"I'll keep them." Bulstrode crammed them into a hind pocket. "I'll hand them back to her some time when I'm passing."

Marsden smiled to himself as he let the other amble away. Then he favored the trailer with another

speculative stare before he departed in the opposite direction.

The ship lifted in the late afternoon of the third day, groaned high in the dank, everlasting fog and was gone toward the mother planet that no man on Venus could see. A sister ship was due in about six weeks' time and another two months afterward. In the intervals between such visits those who remained were a primitive community vastly marooned beneath perpetual cloud.

Miranda went out for her first sight-seeing stroll that same evening. It was pleasant enough because the vaporous blanket came no lower with the night, the air was rich with oxygen which clung to the lower levels although absent from the upper strata. All around were strong plant-odors and the area held comforting warmth.

Here and there amid the sprawl of shacks gleamed many lights served by a small generating-station astride a rushing stream three miles away. Quite a blaze of illumination came from one building midway along the straggling and badly rutted main street.

She walked slowly into this slovenly town whose citizens thought it unworthy even of naming. She noted the rickety fence around somebody's clapboard, one-room hovel and, nearby, the pathetic remnants of a tiny garden soon started and as soon abandoned. One Earth-rose still battled for life amid

an unruly mob of Venusian growths intent upon strangling the stranger from afar.

To her right a larger, three-roomed erection had a dilapidated shop-front with a wire screen in lieu of precious glass, a few rusting hammers, saws, chisels, pliers and other oddments exhibited behind. In the middle of this display stood a crudely lettered sign reading: *Haircut \$1.00. Beard Trim 40¢.* What she had seen of the inhabitants made her wonder whether this sign had ever attracted a customer.

Farther along she came to the extraordinarily well-lit building from which came the noise of fifty or more raucous voices and occasional bursts of song. By local standards it was a large edifice, built mainly of peeled logs and noteworthy for having windows of real glass. Somebody must have paid a fancy price to import those transparent sheets.

Over the door hung a big board bearing neat, precise letters from which condensation dripped steadily.

ANNIE'S PLACE

Anna M. Jones, Prop.

A burly, rubber-booted man trudged along the street, paused outside the door, examined Miranda curiously. He was a complete stranger to her and she to him.

"What's wrong, Sweetie? Annie gone bad on you?"

She eyed him in calm silence.

"Not deaf, are you?"

"No," she said.

"Then why don't you answer a civil question?"

"I didn't consider it civil."

"So that's the way it is, eh?" He gave a thin scowl. "One of those finicky tarts. Like to pick and choose." He shrugged broad, damp shoulders. "You'll come to your senses eventually."

"So will you."

"You'll change before you're through with this life."

"Don't we all?" she offered sweetly.

"Not the way we want," he countered.

"The way God wants," she said.

"Jumping Joseph, don't give me *that* stuff!"

With a loud sniff of contempt he went inside. The noise from the place boosted and sank as the door opened and shut. A waft of air puffed forth loaded with strong tobacco, strong booze and sweat.

Under one of the windows lay an empty crate. Mounting it, Miranda raised herself on tiptoe and glanced inside. Not for long. Just for a brief moment but somewhat in the manner of a general studying the field of battle. It sufficed to show the expected scene of tables, chairs, bottles and eight or nine blowsy women. And even a piano.

Thirty million miles. Every pound, every ounce had to be hauled a minimum of thirty million miles and often much more. So

they didn't have this and they didn't have that—but they did have brewing facilities and a piano.

Well, she couldn't blame them for it. All work and no play adds up to a miserable existence. This was a man's world and men needed an outlet. Annie was supplying the demand. Annie was giving them light and laughter plus girls to whom nothing was too hot or too heavy.

But sooner or later men would discover that they had other needs, if not today then tomorrow or the day after, or next month, or next year. It would be for Miranda rather than for Annie to supply those.

This was a world in the earliest pangs of birth. Astrophysics was the skilled midwife but the fidgeting father was Ordinary Humanity. The world was destined to grow up no matter how reluctant to escape its easy-going, irresponsible childhood.

And it would grow up, become big and civilized, truly a world in its own right. The test of civilization is its capacity for satisfying individual needs, all needs, sober or sodden, sensible or crazy, the need for darkness or light, noise or silence, joy or tears, heaven or hell, salvation or damnation. The adult world would have room for opposites of everything—including Annie and her ilk.

Hurriedly returning to her trailer, Miranda extracted something from its small case, returned to

Annie's place nursing the object in her hands. Except for the tinkling of its piano, the building was silent as she neared. Then suddenly a chorus of hoarse, powerful voices roared into catchy song that shook the door and rattled the windows.

*Anna Maria, Anna Maria, Anna
Maria Jones,
She's the queen of the tamborine,
the banjo and the bones;
Rootitoot she plays the flute in a
fascinating manner,
Pinkety-pong she runs along the
keys of the grand pianner,
Rumpety-tum she bangs the drum
with very superior tones,
Anna Maria, Anna Maria, Anna
Maria Jones!*

They howled the last three words at the very tops of their voices and followed with much hammering upon tables and stamping of feet. Then came an anticipatory quietness as they awaited a response from the subject of their song.

Outside the door Miranda promptly snatched this noiseless pause, stretched her little concertina, made it emit a drone of opening chords, and commenced to sing in a high, sweet voice. The tune was fully as catchy, in fact it had a definite boogey beat, but the words were different—something about Hallelujah, Christ the King.

Within the building a chair got knocked over, a glass was smashed. There sounded a mutter of many voices and several coarse oaths. A

crimson-faced, tousel-haired man jerked open the door and stared at Miranda.

"Jeez!" he said, blinking. "Jeez!"

Several more joined this dumb-founded onlooker, pressing around him or peering over his shoulders. They were too petrified with amazement to think up suitable remarks. Eventually they parted to make way for one of Annie's girls, a startlingly overdeveloped female with hennaed hair and a revealing frock.

Crinkling heavily pencilled eyebrows at the singer, the newcomer said in hard, brittle tones, "Beat it, you fool!"

"Haw-haw!" chortled the tousel-haired man, willing to extract the most from this diversion. "What's the matter, Ivy? You afraid of competition?"

"From that?" Ivy let go a snort of disgust. "Don't talk crazy."

"Oh, I don't know," he said, slyly baiting her. "Annie could use a young and slender one, just for a pleasant change."

"Not a blasted hymn-howler, she couldn't," contradicted Ivy with much positiveness. "And neither could you. Get wise to yourself. You're no scented Adonis."

"Off your knees, Slade," advised one of the others, trying to add fuel to the flames. "Ivy's got you down and she's counting you out."

"Wouldn't be the first time," grinned Slade, giving Ivy a you-know-what-I-mean look.

"Shut up," snapped Ivy irritably. She glared at Miranda. "Are you going to quit yawping or not?"

Miranda sang on, apparently oblivious to everything.

Exhibiting a fat fist ornamented with six rings in which zircons did duty as diamonds, Ivy rasped, "Shuffle off before I hammer you in the teeth. I'm not telling you again."

Adding a couple more decibels to the volume, Miranda poured her hymn through the open door.

Ivy's ample bosom heaved, her face flushed, her eyes glinted. "All right, Misery, you've asked for it. If the fellows won't close your sanctimonious trap, I will!"

So saying she stepped forward, intent on mayhem. Slade grabbed at her and got her big arm, his badly gnawed fingers sinking into the puffy flesh.

"Now, now, Ivy, take it easy."

"Let go of me," ordered Ivy in dangerous tones.

Miranda continued blithely to sing. For good measure she laid it in the groove with a couple of hot licks on the concertina.

"Take your paw off my arm, you smelly tramp," bawled Ivy, crimson with fury.

"Be a lady," suggested Slade, hanging on to her. "Just for once."

That did it. Ivy's rage switched its aim forthwith.

"What d'you mean, just for once?" Swinging her free arm she walloped him over the ear. The blow was intended to knock his

head off but he had seen it coming and rocked with it.

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed a bearded onlooker, holding his belly.

"*Come take the keys to the Kingdom,*" trilled Miranda. "*Hallelujah! Hallelujah!*"

Still employing her unhampered arm, Ivy now smacked the bearded laughter clean in the whiskers. He sat down suddenly and hard, still chortling fit to choke. Several more cackled with him. Ivy hauled furiously against Slade's grip and voiced vitriolic imprecations.

"Ivy!" called a sharp, authoritative voice from somewhere inside.

"Look, Annie," hollered Ivy, "there's a dizzy dame out here and—"

"What's it to me?" inquired the voice acidly. "For the love of Moses come in and shut that door—the fresh air is killing us."

Loud guffaws greeted that sally. Ivy forced herself to simmer down sufficiently to obey, throwing Miranda a look of sudden death before she went inside. The others followed, openly regretting this swift end to the fun. The door closed with a contemptuous bang.

Miranda finished her singing and commenced addressing a speech to thin air. After four minutes of this an old frontiersman came creakily along the street, paused to look her over, stopped to listen. A bit later he removed his hat and held it in one hand. He was a scrawny specimen with clear blue eyes set in a

face resembling an aged and badly wrinkled apple. For reasons best known to himself he did not consider it at all strange that a young woman should take time off to preach to a non-existent congregation.

In fact when she reached the end he wheezed an underbreath, "Amen!" watched her tuck the concertina under one arm and head homeward. After she had gone he remained hat in hand for quite a time before he planted it on his head and mooched ruminatively on his way.

From that time onward Miranda's singing became a regular evening performance. Sometimes she took her stand at one end of the potholed main street, sometimes at the other, and every now and again it was squarely in front of Annie's place.

Gradually the oldster made it a habit to provide her with a one-man audience, standing not too near, not too far off, watching her with bright blue eyes and never uttering a word other than the final, "Amen!" It wasn't inborn piety coming out in later years, it wasn't sympathy with the spirit of rebellion, it wasn't his way of protesting against things that are as distinct from things that ought to be. It was nothing more than the urge to cheer on a little dog fighting a big one.

Passers-by treated Miranda in three different ways. Some stared

blankly ahead and refused to acknowledge her existence. Some threw her the brief, pitying glance one bestows on a village imbecile. The majority grinned and made her the target of coarse witticisms, always malicious and often cruel, opining loudly that religious mania is the natural result of chronic virginity. She never changed color, never winced, never permitted a barb to sink in.

Once in a while the latter type had a go at heckling her speeches, taunting her with unseemly parodies, filling in her pauses with bawdy wisecracks or giving her the mock-support of mock-piety. Her one loyal listener resented these tactics but held his peace and remained content to pose nearby, hat in hand.

There came a night when a burly, blue-jowled drunk dreamed up the ultimate insult. He stood on the boardwalk swaying and bleating all through the sermon, wiping glazed, out-of-focus eyes with the back of a hairy hand and belching loudly whenever she ended a sentence. Then when she had finished he turned to the oldster and ostentatiously tossed a coin into his hat. With a violent burp and an airy wave of his hand he staggered into Annie's place followed by three or four appreciative witnesses.

Gazing angrily into his hat, his blue eyes burning, the old frontiersman said, "See that? The boozy bum flung us a nickel. What'll I do with it?"

"Give it to me." Miranda extended an eager palm.

He passed it over like one in a dream. "Mean to say you'll actually take money from a no-good sot?"

"I would accept it from the Devil himself." She stuck the coin in a pocket. "We can use it for God's work."

"We?" He misunderstood her use of the plural, thought it over, eventually mumbled, "Maybe you're right. Money is money no matter how you get it." Then he had another long think, screwing up his wizened features while he wrestled with a personal problem. Reaching a decision, he moved across, stood beside her shoulder to shoulder and held out his hat invitingly.

"Would you care to sing with me?" she asked, squeezing an opening chord.

"No, Ma'am. I've got a hell of a voice. Just let me be as I am."

"All right." She closed her eyes, opened her mouth and jazzed up a fast one about marching, marching until we come to the Golden Gates.

Ten minutes later a hurrying, self-conscious man reacted to the offer of the extended hat, threw a dime into it, cast a sacred glance around and beat it from the scene of the crime.

She had been on Venus exactly eight weeks. Another ship had come and gone. By now the community glumly accepted that it had a harmless lunatic in its midst.

Digging the little plot outside her trailer early one day, she paused to rest, rubbed the blistered palm of her right hand, glanced up and found a plump, frowsy-looking girl surveying her speculatively.

"Good morning," greeted Miranda, smiling.

"Morning," responded the other shortly and after some hesitation.

"It's nice to meet another woman," Miranda went on. "There are so few of us and so many men around."

"Don't I know it!" gave back the plump girl with subtle meaning. She looked warily up and down the street, eyed the trailer, seemed undecided whether or not to linger.

"Would you care to come inside" Miranda invited. "There's coffee and cakes and I'm starving for a gossip and—"

"I'm Dolly," chipped in the other, saying it with the air of begging pardon for a skunk in her purse.

"How nice. My name is Miranda." Dumping the spade, she went to the trailer, opened its door.

"I work at Annie's," announced Dolly, making no move.

"That must be very interesting. I'd love you to tell me all about it."

Registering a fat scowl, Dolly demanded, "Are you making fun of me?"

"Good gracious, no."

"They make plenty of you."

"I'm used to it."

"I'm not," said Dolly. She had another uneasy look up and down

the street, added, "Hell of a place."

"If you'd care to come in, please do."

"I guess I will." She advanced as if breasting an invisible tide. "I've gone past caring, see?" Entering, she flopped onto a pneumatic seat, studied her surroundings with frank curiosity. "Nice little joint you've got here."

"Thank you. I'm so glad you like it." Pumping her kerosene stove, Miranda lit it and adjusted the flame.

"Damnsight better than my flea-trap. Everyone says you're cracked. H'm! It sure looks like it. This holy biz must pay off."

"It does."

"So I see," said Dolly with a touch of malice. Her eyes narrowed. "Where's the catch?"

Miranda turned to look at her, coffee percolator in hand. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Nobody makes a bad cent without surrendering their heart's blood for it one way or another," informed Dolly. "You have got to give in order to receive. What's your sacrifice?"

"Nothing much. Only my life, such as it is." Capping the percolator, Miranda placed it on the stove, asked with deceptively casual interest, "What do *you* give?"

"Shut up!" snapped Dolly savagely. She rocked to and fro, nursing a cheap and clumsy purse on her lap and staring down at her big knees. She did this for quite a time. Then without warning she

harshed, "I'm damn sick of it!" and burst into tears.

Taking no notice, Miranda continued to busy herself with various tasks in the tiny kitchen and left her visitor to howl it out. Dolly shook and sobbed, blindly feeling for a handkerchief. Finally she stood up, tear-stained and full of embarrassment.

"I'd better be going."

"Oh, not now, surely. The coffee is just about ready."

"I've made a prize fool of myself."

"Nonsense. A woman is entitled to a good cry once in a while." Taking little cakes from a cupboard, Miranda arranged them on a flowered plate. "Makes one feel lots better sometimes."

"How the blazes do you know?"

Dolly sat down again, dabbed the corners of her eyes, stared at the cakes. "Bet you've never bawled bloody murder."

"I did the day my father died."

"Oh." She swallowed hard, examined thick, unmanicured fingers, said after a long pause, "I don't remember my old man."

"How sad." Miranda poured the coffee.

"And not so much of my mother either," continued Dolly morbidly reminiscent. "I ran away from her when I was fifteen. She didn't think I was cut out to be a great actress. But I knew better, see?"

"Yes, I see."

"So I pranced around in the chorus line of a crummy road-show

and that's as far as I got. The years rolled on, I couldn't keep my hips down and slowly but surely I was shoved toward the breadline by younger kids as daft as I had been. So . . . so . . . a girl has to do *something*, hasn't she?"

"Most certainly," agreed Miranda. "Will you try one of these cakes. I made them myself last night."

"Thanks." Dolly took a large bite, choked with emotion, blew her nose and said, "I went the way of all flesh, if you know what I mean. I got pawed around and kicked about something awful. But at least I ate. Thank God my mother never knew about it—she'd have died of shame."

Miranda, wisely, offered no comment.

"I finished up here with Annie. Sort of wanted to get away from everything over there." Dolly used her piece of cake to point more or less Earthward. "Now I'd go back on the next ship if there was anything for me to make it worth the going. But there isn't. Not for me. I picked this lousy, godforsaken dump and I'm stuck with it for keeps."

"Well, there is plenty for a woman to do here," opined Miranda, sipping her coffee.

"You're dead right there is—and I'm fed up doing it. What else is there?"

"This town will want hundreds of things as time rolls on. It can't grow without them."

"Such as what?" Dolly persisted sceptically.

"Just for a start, a little laundry might be a good idea."

"A laundry?" Dolly was reluctant to believe her ears. "The few girls do their own washing. The men don't wash at all. Who the blazes wants a laundry?"

"The men," said Miranda. "Obviously."

"Who'd operate it?" challenged Dolly, changing her angle of attack.

"We two."

She dropped her piece of cake, fumbled around for it, retrieved it and stared wide-eyed at Miranda. "Mean to say you really think I'd get busy scrubbing clothes for a living?" She gave an unconvincing sniff. "I wouldn't sink so low."

"I would."

"Then why don't you?"

"I intend to." Miranda indicated a couple of large packing cases looming outside the window. "One plastic tent and one fully automatic washing-machine. All I need is power. They're fixing me up with an electricity supply tomorrow."

"You've got a nerve," said Dolly. "Christ, you've got a nerve!"

"Haven't you?"

Standing up, Dolly prowled restlessly around the small space, gazed a couple of times at the packing cases, scowled and muttered to herself, mooched to and fro. After a while she said, "Don't tempt me."

"Why not?"

"Annie would sling me out on

my neck. Either I work for her or I don't. Besides, I'd have no place to sleep."

"This is a two-berth trailer."

"So what?" Dolly let her hands flap around as if she didn't know what to do with them. "You don't need a haybag like me."

"Everybody is needed by someone," said Miranda gently. "Everybody."

"You're only saying that."

"It's the truth, all the same. Don't you believe me?"

"I'd like to. It isn't easy."

"It should be," Miranda mused. "I've never found any difficulty in believing the things I want to believe."

Ignoring that remark, Dolly again ambled round and round the tiny floor-space. "By God!" she said. "By God!"

"Besides," added Miranda for good measure, "we'd be helped quite a piece."

"Oh, yes? By whom?"

"By God."

Dolly flinched and snapped back, "We'll be on the skids with anyone less than God Almighty."

"All that's required of us is courage. One can still have that when one has nothing else."

"You're the kind of loony yap who can talk your way into anything and talk your way out of it again," observed Dolly. She reached a reluctant decision, shrugged plump shoulders. "Looks like you are touched in the head and you've made me that way too. Anyway.

you've got company. If you can get away with it why shouldn't I?"

"Like another coffee?" Miranda reached for the cup.

They were having a hopeless struggle with the tent next morning when Bulstrode came along, joined the fray, pitted his brute strength against unruly folds of plastic. Between the three of them they erected it, pegged its stays, fixed it good and tight.

"Anything more?" inquired Bulstrode, brushing his hands.

"I hardly like to trouble you," said Miranda, her gaze straying toward the other crate.

"Think nothing of it," he assured, secretly surprised to find himself enjoying this spell of gallantry. It lent him a special air of proprietorship. Breaking the crate open, he dragged the machine into the tent, looked it over, asked, "What's the use of this gadget with nothing to drive it?"

"We're having power laid on this afternoon and water tonight," Miranda explained. "Tomorrow, you'll see, this will be the M and D Laundry."

"The whatta?"

"The Miranda and Dolly Laundry."

"I've been wondering what you were doing here," said Bulstrode, giving Dolly an incredulous once-over. "Don't tell me *you're* in this?"

"Any objections, Hamface?" demanded Dolly aggressively.

"No business of mine," he said, backing away fast.

"Thank you so much," put in Miranda. "We could never have coped without your help."

"It was a pleasure." He glowered around in search of witnesses, truculently ready to prove his hardness to any who might accuse him of becoming soft. There were none in sight. He lumbered away and they heard him growl underbreath as he went, "A laundry—holy mackerel!"

Staring after the burly figure, Dolly said wonderingly, "What made that muscle-bound bum pitch in?"

"We needed him," said Miranda.

Dolly stewed it over, responded quietly, "I'm beginning to think you've got something."

"Do you feel it strongly enough to come out with me this evening?"

"Out with you?" She showed puzzlement swiftly followed by uneasiness. "Singing in the street?"

"Yes."

"Nothing doing." Dolly waved agitated hands. "Don't ask me *that!* I've given Annie the brush-off and come in with you on this crazy stunt but don't ask me *that!*"

"What's wrong with it?"

"There's nothing *wrong*, I suppose," admitted Dolly, her alarm increasing by leaps and bounds. "It's not the sort of thing I care to do."

"Afraid they'll laugh at you?"

"And how! They'll bellow until their buttons fly off."

"They don't do that to me," Miranda mentioned.

"That's because . . . because—"

"Because what?"

"You've been around quite a time. They know you're off your head and they're tired of making the most of it. A joke wears thin when it's used again and again and again. They've come to the point of accepting you as you are."

"That's true, Dolly. It always happens if you are sufficiently determined, if you stick it out long enough. And it can happen to you too."

"I'm in no mood to try." Her voice went up a couple of notes. "I've been the plaything of boozey apes too long to make myself the target of their cheap sneers now. Don't shove me further than I want to go. Enough is enough."

"All right. You don't mind me leaving you by yourself for a couple of hours?"

"Mind? Why should I? Nothing can happen to me that hasn't happened fifty times. Besides, I'm not a kid. You go do your holy serenading. I'll tidy the place and have supper ready for when you come back."

"Thank you. It will be nice to return to someone." Miranda smiled at her, added, "I'm glad to have you with me. I'm really glad."

"Oh, cut it out," said Dolly, deeply embarrassed.

And so that evening one remained in the trailer and absorbed the long-forgotten atmosphere of a

home while the other took the concertina into town.

The wrinkled oldster was waiting as now he invariably did. By this time Miranda had learned his name: James Hanford. But that was all she knew of him.

"Good evening, Jimmy," she greeted.

"Good evening, Miss Dean," he responded solemnly.

Then he stood beside her at the kerb and held out his tattered hat while she began to sing. The collection amounted to one quarter, one nickel and one worthless brass slug.

There sounded an imperative knock at the trailer door in the midafternoon of next day. Answering, Miranda found a tall, stately woman waiting outside. The visitor appeared to be in her late fifties, with white, regal-looking hair and intelligent but arrogant features.

"Good afternoon," said Miranda, a trifle primly.

"That depends on what one makes of it," answered the other in sharp, cynical tones. She subjected Miranda to a careful examination with dark gray eyes that had seen more than enough. "May I come in?"

"Please do."

"Thank you." Entering, the visitor glanced around with begrudging approval, announced, "Doubtless you have heard of me. I am Annie." Her cultured voice held sour humor as she added, "Once

known as Anytime Annie. But that was long ago."

"How interesting," said Miranda. "Do sit down."

"I prefer to stand." Again she had a look over the trailer. "H'm! Quite domesticated. Where is Dolly?"

"Outside. Working in the tent."

"So she really is here?" said Annie, in the manner of one confirming a ridiculous rumor. "Why has she left me?"

"She's ambitious."

"A clever answer," Annie conceded. "I admire you for it. You must be smarter than they say."

"Thank you so much."

"In which direction do her ambitions lie?"

"We've started a laundry."

"A laundry?" Annie's well-plucked eyebrows lifted a fraction. "Do you think you're a couple of Chinks?"

"I presume you mean Chinese?"

"That's right."

"Do we look like Chinese?"

"Dolly is and always has been far too stupid to know what's good for her," went on Annie, evading the point.

"But you are *so* much wiser?"

"I ought to be, my dear. Much as I hate to admit it, I am old enough to be her mother. I have been around for quite a spell. One learns a lot of things through the passing years."

"I should hope so," Miranda gave back fervently. "It must be terrible to learn them all too late."

Annie winced, recovered. "You have a quick tongue." She waved a hand to indicate the surroundings. "I think *you* could do better for yourself than *this*."

"I'm quite happy."

"Of course you are. You have youth on your side. The days of disillusionment have yet to come. But they will, they will!"

"I doubt it," observed Miranda. "My line of business is vastly different from yours. I find it rather satisfying."

"Clothes scrubbing and hymn howling," scoffed Annie, displaying a wealth of contempt. "Any incurable cretin could do either." She brushed the subject aside. "But I have not come here to waste time on profitless argument. All I want is a word with Dolly."

"Very well." Sliding the window to one side, Miranda called toward the tent. "Dolly! Dolly!"

In short time Dolly arrived, scowled at the sight of who was waiting for her, demanded, "What do you want?"

"You!" informed Annie succinctly. "It's plenty hard enough to drag girls all the way here without them going temperamental on me afterwards. So collect your clothes and your scattered wits and come back where you belong."

"You can go to hell," said Dolly.

"Someday I shall—according to those peculiarly well-informed." Annie threw a brief, sardonic smile toward Miranda. "But that time is

not yet. Meanwhile, you will continue to work for me."

"I'm not your slave. Why should I?"

"Because I picked you out of the gutter and that's where you're heading right now."

"That is a statement of opinion rather than of fact," Miranda put in.

"I'll thank you to keep out of this," Annie retorted. "You have meddled enough." She returned attention to Dolly. "Well, are you going to see reason or not?"

"I don't want to go back."

"You will, in your own good time. And then I won't take you. Not at any price. You could starve to death on my doorstep and I wouldn't bother to toss you a crumb. So it's now or never." She studied the other calculatingly. "Opportunity is knocking for the last time. You can return to me or stay here and rot."

"I'm staying."

"Very well. Someday you'll regret it. When that time comes you need not bring your troubles to me." Turning to the door, she spoke to Miranda with exaggerated courtesy. "Thank you for having me."

"You're most welcome," said Miranda. "*Anytime.*"

"So kind of you," responded Annie, refusing to twitch. Outside, she added, "I know your kind. I've met them before. You'll keep on and keep on squalling until you've got all the dopes solidly behind

you." Her smile was a warning. "But you'll never get *me*."

With that she departed. Miranda went indoors, sat down, stared at the subdued Dolly.

"What a strange person. I didn't expect her to be like that."

"Like what?" asked Dolly, little interested.

"She seems slightly aristocratic."

"Pah!" said Dolly. "A vaudeville artist busted on the boards. A theatrical floppo. She rose higher than I did, fell farther and landed harder. Still flaunts the grand manner. Still thinks she's really somebody. It's one of the things I hate about her—always acting so clever, so superior."

"One must learn not to hate."

"Why?"

"Because people are as life has made them."

"You can't alter people," declared Dolly flatly.

"But you can change life," said Miranda. "Why, you have just changed yours."

At the end of another six months the laundry was functioning regularly, at a modest profit, and had a small but steadily growing list of customers who were discovering that a clean shirt goes well with a shave and haircut.

The tent had been replaced by a peeled log cabin built by Bulstrode and a dozen cronies who'd concealed their inward pleasure beneath a stream of blasphemy. The aged Jimmy had appointed himself gen-

eral handyman and Bulstrode had developed the habit of keeping an eye on things by calling in from time to time.

Most importantly of all, the community had now accepted the situation as one unalterable either by opposition or by pointed criticism. Indeed, it was impossible to think up an adequate reason for opposing. In everyone's eyes Dolly had become established as a genuine laundress while it was understood by one and all that Jimmy had some sort of stake in the business and that the bearlike Bulstrode was its unofficial protector.

The days of ridicule and venom had drifted by like fragments of an evil dream. The subject was exhausted of cruel humor and there was nothing derogatory left to be said. Sheer persistence had converted the formerly odd into a present-day convention; all that once had been resented was now taken for granted and recognized as an integral part of the Venusian scene.

Sheer persistence.

Subconsciously sensing this change in social atmosphere, Dolly found that it required no redoubtable effort of will to go out with Miranda one evening. Taking a tambourine from its box in the trailer, she was satisfied at first merely to beat time with the singing but after four nights her courage suddenly welled up. She joined in with a bellowing but not unpleasant contralto and the town accepted without comment that now two voices

were crying in the Venusian wilderness. Jimmy still remained silent, content to hold the hat and lend the moral support of his presence.

But they were three. A daft virgin, an aged washout and an erstwhile whore.

More ships had solidified out of the everlasting mist and dissolved back into it, the last bringing a couple of families complete with children. Swiftly erected shacks lengthened the main street by half a mile and there was half-hearted, perfunctory talk of throwing up a ramshackle school for the moppets. The nameless town was growing slowly but surely—creeping toward its destiny of a someday city.

One morning Miranda left the laundry in the others' care, picked her way across four miles of rubble-strewn ground and reached the niobium extraction plant. It was a big, dirty place where hammer-mills set up a deafening clatter and grinders roared without cease; a place full of big-chested men smeared with mud formed of granite-dust and moisture. Finding the office, she handed in her card.

Somebody conducted her to an inner room where a wide-shouldered man with dark hair and fuzzy mustache stood behind his desk, the card in hand. A second man, red-haired and lean-faced, posed nearby and studied the visitor with frank curiosity.

"Please be seated," said the mustached one, indicating a chair. "My

name is Langtree." He motioned toward his companion. "And this is Mr. McLeish."

"So glad to know you," responded Miranda.

Waiting for her to sit, Langtree resumed his own chair, had another look at the card. "Now what can we do for you . . . er . . . Lieutenant?"

McLeish gave a slight start of surprise, bent over to examine the card for himself.

"I understand that this company registers title to land," said Miranda.

"In that respect we are functioning on behalf of the Terran Government," Langtree told her. "It is a temporary expedient. Copies of claims are shipped to Earth and are not effective until approved and recorded there. We have no real legislative status of our own. We are merely deputed to act until such time as this planet can support a few bureaucrats."

"All the same, you can assign unclaimed land?"

"Providing that it has no known mineral deposits," he conceded. "Do you have something in mind?"

"Yes, Mr. Langtree. There's a nice, large vacant lot right in the middle of the main street. I can't imagine why nobody has taken it. But if it hasn't been claimed, I want it."

He gave a rueful smile. "That particular piece of estate has been reserved for this company's headquarters whenever we can get

around to some real, solid building."

"I'm sorry. I didn't know."

"Don't let it worry you. Recently we have changed our minds and it's most unlikely that we'll use that plot."

"Why not?" Her oval face became hopeful.

"Originally we supposed that the town would remain centered exactly where it is right now and that we had grabbed ourselves a good, dominating position. But now it is obvious that things aren't going to work out that way. Geologists have discovered rich supplies of pitchblende in the east, a railroad will be constructed in that direction and the town's natural tendency will be to spread along the tracks." He pondered a moment, said, "You realize what that means?"

"No—what does it mean?"

"If this place ever becomes big—which I think it will—and if it has a slummy area—which unfortunately is very probable—the plot you want will be smack among the shacks and garbage dumps. It will be in a district anything but salubrious."

"So much the better."

He frowned at that, went on, "Moreover it is directly opposite Annie's dump where all the rowdies tend to congregate."

"So much the better," she repeated.

"Have you ever lived in a big city?" put in McLeish.

"Yes."

"In parts that are . . . well . . . not nice?"

"Nowhere else."

"And did you *like* it?" he persisted.

"Of course. It was very convenient for me because my work lay right outside my door."

"Oh!" He subsided in defeat.

Langtree harumphed, pulled at his mustache, asked, "For what purpose do you require this land, Lieutenant?"

"For a place of worship—eventually."

"That is what I thought." He played the mustache again. "You put me in a poor position to refuse."

"Do you *want* to refuse?" she inquired, open-eyed.

"Not exactly." He sought around for means of expressing himself, continued, "Naturally we approve your plan. In fact we support it most heartily. But we deplore the timing."

"Why?"

"You've managed to establish yourself in a small and tough community. So far you've got by. But don't let that fool you. It's going to be lots tougher before it becomes easier."

"You really think so?"

"I'm certain of it. Since the first ship made its landfall we've had eighteen murders and forty or more attempted ones. Not to mention plenty of lesser crimes. That's nothing, nothing at all. The real labor pains are yet to come."

He paused for comment from her but got none.

"Immediately the railroad is completed we'll have four shiploads of

roughnecks here to operate the mines. Only yesterday we received prospectors' reports of large deposits of silver and osmiridium to the north and those will entice plenty more hard characters." Studying her thoughtfully, he assured, "You haven't seen anything yet."

"Neither has this town," she gave back, smiling.

"I don't doubt that. And I don't doubt that you intend to show it plenty. But I'd feel a lot happier if you'd put the brake on your ambitions until at least we've reached the dignity of having a small police force."

"Wouldn't it be much more satisfactory never to need one?" she asked.

Throwing up both hands in mock despair, Langtree said, "I should know better than to argue with the opposite sex."

"Then may I have this piece of land?" She leaned forward, her expression eager.

"You're hamstrung, manacled, pinned down and counted out," opined McLeish, grinning at Langtree. "You might as well quit."

"I surrender." Langtree heaved a sigh of resignation. "Go fetch the papers."

When they had been brought he read carefully through them, filled them in triplicate, showed her where to sign, gave her one copy. She departed, grateful and bright-eyed. Langtree flopped back in his seat and gazed absently at the wall.

After a while, he said, "I guess it was inevitable. It had to come sooner or later."

"Think so?"

"Yes. Ever noticed how big cities are boosted out of the dirt?"

"Sure," said McLeish. "They're raised by a horde of steel-erectors, bricklayers, masons and hod-carriers bossed by fellows who wander around consulting blueprints."

"And by the long sustained pressure of a thousand and one determined groups," declared Langtree with emphasis. "The Quakers forced Philadelphia out of the earth. The Mormons raised Salt Lake City from the desert. Earth is spattered with New Jerusalems built by pernicky dissenters and various gangs of one-track-minders. Stands to sense the same things will happen wherever humanity is located."

"Maybe you're right," McLeish admitted.

"I remember that when they concocted that new rocket-fuel they said that space was ours. It wasn't. They had to spend years designing combustion-chambers able to contain the pressures. So now we're squirted across the heavens by a blast that is somewhat terrific. And still it isn't enough. Now we must settle, exploit and build under psychological thrusts that can't and won't be contained."

"So it seems."

"It's only a matter of time before some fellow with a bee in his bonnet will try to prevent all building within a particular square mile of land

because he thinks it ought to be reserved for a city park. He'll get like-minders behind him. They'll bellow and bawl and agitate until the area is officially protected and finally becomes a park. Another mob will compel all booze saloons to behave in a civilized manner. Another gang will push and shove and play merry hell until we've a hospital and a maternity home long before we can really afford either. Sustained pressure—it gets there in the end."

"It isn't easy to brush it aside," remarked McLeish.

"It's well-nigh impossible," Langtree asserted. "The pushful groups provide a development-factor that objective scientists rarely take into account. They can bring about the cumulative effect of a very large bomb, but slowly." He thought some more, added reminiscently, "When I was a kid a creeper thrust a thin tendril through a minute crack in the garden wall. My old man wanted to cut it but Mom wouldn't let him. Sixteen years later that wall was busted. You'd have thought a heavy howitzer had scored a direct hit on it. My old man had to pay fifty dollars for new brickwork."

"That girl is different," said McLeish. "She's a human being. She'd have to push until she'd grown old."

"Man, I've seen them do that too." Langtree threw an inquiring glance at the other. "Would you?"

"Not on your life!"

"She would. And it won't surprise me if she does."

"It's a shame," decided McLeish for no logical reason. "But perhaps it's a good thing for this or any other world."

"This or any other world *needs* a few good things," said Langtree.

The vacant lot still remained a vacant lot at the end of another year. Some fine day when enough money, hands and material were available it would hold a stone-built, glass-windowed flophouse that would also be a house of God. At times it seemed as if such a culmination was an impossibly long way off, that the temporarily homeless would have no place to sleep, the spiritually hungry no place to pray. But the lot was held in stubborn possession because everything comes to those who wait.

At the laundry there were now three washing-machines and Jimmy had become an energetic, full-time worker therein. Bulstrode was a frequent visitor with the frequency increasing as the weeks went by. Once or twice the big man had been frightened and horrified by a secret desire to turn the street parading trio into a quartet. He had stepped upon it firmly, crushing it down.

His strength was also his weakness in that he doubted his ability to counter a crude insult with anything less than a broken nose. And from occasional remarks let slip by Miranda he'd gathered that nose-busting was out, most definitely out.

That made it awfully hard on a powerful man with furry arms. It meant that he would have to answer blood-heating jibes with a forgiving smile when it would be less trouble and infinitely more satisfying to break a neck.

Such was the situation when the sixteenth ship came out of the eternal mist beyond which gleamed a host of stars including a great green one called Terra. The ship unloaded a little aluminum trailer the exact copy of Miranda's. An elderly couple, gray-haired and wise-eyed, arrived with it, positioned it next door, had a few small crates dumped alongside.

A sedate celebration was held in the log laundry that afternoon. The newcomers greeted Miranda in the manner of oldtime friends, were introduced as Major and Captain Bennett. Miranda handed around pie, coffee and cakes, her face flushed and eyes alight with the pleasure of meeting.

In due time Bulstrode wandered outside, stood gazing at the crates and whistling idly to himself. Soon Major Bennett joined him.

"More washing contraptions?" Bulstrode asked.

"Dear me, no. Three should be sufficient for a while." He examined the nearest boxes. "These are musical instruments."

"Huh?" Bulstrode's heavy face livened with sudden interest. "Want them emptied out?"

"There's no hurry. I'm sure we can manage."

"I'm doing nothing. And I like rusting crates open."

"Then we may as well deal with them," said Major Bennett. "The job has to be done sometime." Finding a case-lever, he started prying up slats with the slow carefulness of the aged.

Scorning this method, Bulstrode hooked big, hard fingertips under the lid of another, bulged his arms and drew it up with nails squeaking. He peeped inside.

"Suffering cats!" he whispered.

"What's the matter?"

"A drum." He voiced it in low, reverent tones like one uttering a holy name. Sliding trembling hands into the crate, he fondled the contents. "As I live and breathe, a big bass drum!"

"Surely there is nothing remarkable about that?" said Bennett, mystified.

With a faraway look in his eyes, Bulstrode told him, "For more than ten years I carried the big bass drum in the hometown band."

"You did?"

"Yes, tiger-skin and all. It was a darned fine band."

Lowering his arms into the crate, Bulstrode gently drew forth the drum. He made another dip, brought out a pair of fat-knobbed sticks also a broad leather sling complete with chest and belly hooks. He tightened the drum's vellum. Then slowly, like one in a dream, he donned the sling, fastened the drum upon his huge chest, looped the sticks on his wrists.

For about half a minute he posed like a statue dreaming wistfully of days long gone by. Something took possession of him. Fire leaped into his eyes. He twirled the drumsticks into twin discs of light, spun them sidewise, above, inward, outward and across, flashing them hither and thither while flicking the taut vellum with expert beat.

Boom. Boom. Bop - bop - boom went the big bass drum.

Drawn by the sound the others came out of the laundry and watched fascinated while the drumsticks whirled and the great drum sounded. Finally, he stopped.

"Jeez!" he said, flush-faced.

Without comment Major Bennett extracted a silver cornet from its case and handed it to his wife. Next he produced a trombone, fitted it together, checked its slide action with a tentative toot. He eyed Bulstrode shrewdly.

"By hokey!" said that individual.

"It takes me back years." He looked around in a semi-daze, noticed Miranda socketing together a pole bearing a large flag. "Years!" he said.

Still watching him, Bennett offered no remark. He had the manner of an experienced cook who knows exactly when the joint will be done to perfection.

"This town could use a good band," asserted Bulstrode, eyeing the trombone and licking his lips.

"We have nobody to play the flute, the oboe and the tuba," said Bennett quietly. "Nobody to beat

the drum. Someday we'll find them among those able to kneel and pray, able to fight for the things they believe to be right."

Unhooking the drum and discarding the sling, Bulstrode carefully placed them on the ground. Then he stared at his feet, fidgeted about, transferred the stare to the sky.

"Reckon I'd better be going," he announced. Starting to back away, he met Miranda's eyes and found his feet strangely frozen to the earth.

"Goodbye!" encouraged Dolly in a tone he did not like.

A slight perspiration broke out on his forehead. His thick lips worked around but no words came forth. He was in psychic agony, like a man paralyzed by sheer need to flee.

Putting down the trombone, Major Bennett took him by the arm, led him into the trailer and out of the others' sight.

"Let us speak to God," he said and sank upon his knees.

After considerable hesitation, Bulstrode made sure the door was shut and windows obscured before kneeling beside him. Putting an arm across his shoulders, Bennett held him while they spoke to God because that is the fashion of their kind. Other pressure-groups, other rigmaroles. This was theirs; to say what they wished to say side by side, shoulder to shoulder, before their Supreme Commander.

When they came out, soldiers both, Miranda had opened another box containing hats but no uni-

forms. Peaked caps and poke bonnets ornamented with red-lettered ribbons. Self-consciously fitting on a cap, Bulstrode strove to divert attention from himself by loudly admiring Dolly in her new bonnet.

"My, you look good in that," he enthused.

"Don't you pick on me," she snapped.

"But I mean it. You look kind of . . . uh . . . nice."

"I'm as fat as a hog and I know it."

"Plumpish," he corrected. "Just the way you ought to be."

"Nuts," she said. "A hat's a hat and makes no difference to what's under it."

"There is a difference. You're not the same person."

"Oh, go take a walk you big clumsy lug!" With that, Dolly produced a handkerchief and started to snivel.

"Jeepers," said Bulstrode, aghast. "I didn't mean to—"

Miranda pulled gently at his sleeve and explained. "A woman often weeps when she's happy."

"That so?" He crinkled bushy eyebrows at her, mildly dumbfounded. "Mean to say she's enjoying herself?"

Dolly sobbed louder to confirm it.

"Good grief!" said Bulstrode quite unconscious of the pun. He studied Dolly in frank amazement until eventually she composed herself, wiped her eyes and gave him an embarrassed smile.

Now he refitted the sling and took up the drum in the manner of one claiming his own after countless years. He hooked it onto his chest, good holding it in proud possession. He twirled the sticks, again delighting in the feel of them.

"Christ Jesus," he said without blasphemy, "this town is going to take an awful licking!" A thought struck him and he looked hopefully at Miranda. "How soon are we going to give it to them hot and strong?"

She didn't answer. She seemed to be waiting for something. All of them stood there in caps and poke bonnets watching him and waiting for something. Momentarily it puzzled him, that and the electric suspense in the air. For whom or what were they waiting? Was there any good reason to wait at all?

It entered his mind that the big drum takes the lead and sets the pace.

Always.

Involuntarily his fingers tightened around the sticks, his leg muscles

stiffened in readiness, his chest swelled, his eyes flamed and what was within him burst forth as a triumphant shout.

"Now!"

It galvanized them into activity. Human pressure was on the boost. Old Jimmy donned the pole-sling, braced the flag in his grip. The others closed the trailers, collected their instruments, formed in two ranks of three each.

For a few seconds they stood to attention like troops on parade. The pale, fog-ridden Venusian light sparkled on cornet and concertina, trombone and tambourine, while the big drum hung poised and the great flag flew above them fast and free.

Then Bulstrode swung a stick and struck one loud, imperative note.

Boom!

In exact step both ranks started off upon the left foot and advanced with military precision upon the waiting town.

Glory! Glory!

The Salvation Army was marching into battle for the Lord.

THREE WHITE MICE

THREE WHITE MICE traveled 1,400 miles into space this past spring and summer in the nose cones of Air Force Thor-Able rockets, according to a report read at the American Rocket Society's recent annual convention. This was the highest altitude any living thing has reached so far. Laika, the dog in Sputnik II (launched November 3, 1957) reached a highpoint of 1,020 miles.

None of the mice were recovered, but heart beats of two of them were radioed back. It was known that at least one of them was "certainly alive" throughout the 15,000 mph six-thousand-mile-long flight.

the wistful witch

by . . . Robert F. Young

Anybody might think that she wanted to be a witch—and anybody thinking so would have been correct.

MELANIE was thinking about Fred when the knock sounded at the door.

Specifically, she was thinking about the quarrel they'd had the night before. It wasn't their first quarrel and it wasn't even their worst quarrel, but she couldn't get it out of her mind.

It was all over the new hat she'd bought yesterday afternoon. Lately Fred had become quite critical about her taste in hats, and it had been her intention to hide this one. But she arrived home late and, in her haste to get supper ready, she forgot all about it.

He must have seen it the minute he came in the front door. She flew into the living room when she heard the sound of paper tearing, but by the time she got there he already had the hat out of the hat box and was holding it up as though it was some deplorable cast-off she'd picked up at a rummage sale, instead of one of the local milliner's latest imports from Fifth Avenue. "Another witch hat!" he said, a defeated look on his boyish face.

"Witch hats are the rage now," Melanie said. "Everybody's wearing them."

We are told that there are all sorts of people from different planes—and even from different planets—walking around these streets of ours and taking a hand occasionally in our affairs. And it's not impossible that Mr. Michelson might very well be one of these people—or beings. . . .

"You're the only one I ever saw wearing one!"

"Can I help it if Tompkinsville is way behind the times? Can I help it if all the women ever do around here is have babies and watch TV?"

"And what's wrong with having babies and watching TV?"

"Nothing's wrong—except that I can't see why people should let themselves become *completely* provincial just because they live in a small town. They should at least *try* to broaden their interests—"

"By buying witch hats, I suppose."

Melanie stamped her foot. "All right then! By buying these witch hats!"

"But darling, *four* witch hats in one year! Anybody'd think you *wanted* to be a witch!"

"Well maybe I do!" Melanie said. Then she gave a little gasp and put her hand over her mouth.

But she was too late . . .

The knock had sounded on the kitchen door, and when Melanie answered it she found a small humpbacked man standing meekly on the backporch. "Good morning," he said brightly. "My name is Mr. Michelson and I have a product here which I think might interest you."

He had round pink cheeks, and the bluest pair of eyes she had ever seen. He had doffed his hat and was holding it in one hand, exposing his silvery hair to the October sun-

light; in his other hand he carried a long black case.

Melanie had the average housewife's distaste for door-to-door salesmen, but there was something about this one that made it impossible for her to turn him away. Perhaps it was because of the way he was regarding her (as though the tall, willowy girl with the black, bobbed hair, who had just answered the door, did not quite live up to his idea of what a prospective customer for his product should look like). "Come in," she said, and, after wiping his feet carefully on the backporch carpet, Mr. Michelson stepped into the kitchen.

He unopened his case and set it on the floor. Melanie watched curiously while he unsnapped the lid. At first she was disappointed when his product proved to be a broom. Then she saw what a remarkable broom it was. Her fingers actually tingled when she touched the polished ebony handle, and when she made a few tentative sweeping motions, the golden bristles left a path of gleaming linoleum behind them.

"Why," she gasped, "I had no idea my floor was *that* dirty!"

"It's a very special broom," Mr. Michelson said.

She swept some more. The linoleum grew brighter and brighter, shone with a resplendence it had never known before. "How—how much is it?" she asked.

"I'll tell you what," Mr. Michelson said. "Suppose I leave it with

you for a day and give you a chance to try it out before telling you the price? I'll stop by tomorrow morning and, if you're still interested, you can settle with me then. I'll have the con—, I mean the bill of sale, drawn up in the meantime. How does that suit you?"

There was a disconcerting quality in his blue eyes that gave her pause. Was he trying to pull her leg? Was a bill of sale really necessary in so simple a transaction? Then she returned her attention to the broom, marveling again at the clean line of its handle, at the graceful swell of its golden bristles. "All right," she said presently. "I don't see what I've got to lose."

"Fine!" Mr. Michelson closed the empty case, picked it up, and turned to go. Melanie noticed, then, how really humped his back was; there was something odd about the hump too, though she couldn't put her finger on what the oddness was.

He paused on the backporch, snapped his fingers. "Oh, yes, I almost forgot to mention it," he said. "There'll be a book in the mail for you tomorrow—a sort of premium, you might say. If you decide to keep the broom, you can keep the book too . . . Till tomorrow morning then—" He made a small bow and replaced his hat. "Happy Landings!"

Now that was a strange thing for him to say, Melanie thought, closing the door and going over to the

picture window and watching him walk briskly down the drive and climb into his blue Ford. What did flying have to do with brooms?

Abruptly she caught her breath. The broom slipped from her fingers, toppled to the floor. Then her common sense reasserted itself and she gave a tense little laugh. Such a ridiculous turn of thought! Resolutely she picked up the broom, carried it to the hall closet, shoved it into a dark corner and closed the door.

She returned to her dusting, from which Mr. Michelson's knock had summoned her. Thanks to the interruption she was even further behind on her housework than usual. Not only that, the neighborhood coffee club met at eleven o'clock, and here it was, a quarter to already!

She sighed. Another morning wasted—and it was Gladys' turn to play hostess too. Melanie hoped she didn't overpeck the coffee the way she had the last time it was her turn. Gladys was all right, but she was so absorbed in her baby that she sometimes neglected other things. Melanie didn't like to be hypercritical, but if it was your turn to make the coffee, you should make it right, baby or no baby.

Slyly, her thoughts shifted to Fred. She had to admit that their marriage, now in its sixth month, hadn't turned out the way either of them had expected it to. Every day she could see Fred's increasing discontent in his eyes, hear it in his

voice. And she didn't need to ask what was troubling him; she knew what it was.

But it wasn't fair! They'd agreed about babies long ago. She'd remarked frequently and pointedly, when they were going together, that the sensible time to raise a family was when you were old enough to appreciate one. It was absurd, she'd said, for young people to tie themselves down right off the bat, and there was the very real danger that you might even resent your own babies for keeping you home all the time when you weren't psychologically ready to stay home all the time. And Fred had agreed with every word she'd said, kissing her after every sentence and nodding his head emphatically.

She realized now that he hadn't taken her seriously at all, that he'd probably laughed at her behind her back, confident she'd change her mind. Well, she hadn't changed her mind and she didn't intend to, and he could make all the nasty remarks he wanted to about her taste in hats and about her wanting to be a witch and—

She watched the small and lonely tear that had run down her cheek, fall forlornly to the living room rug . . .

"Come in," Gladys called down from upstairs. "Oh, it's you, Melanie. The rest of the girls aren't here yet." Then: "Come up and see my little man this morning."

Gladys was giving him his

bottle. "Isn't he *adorable*?" she asked.

Melanie lingered in the nursery doorway. She caught a glimpse of a small fist, a rotund face and two blue eyes brimming with wonderment. Despite her efforts to calm it, her heart began to pound. She raised one hand to her throat. Presently she became aware that Gladys had asked a question, a purely rhetorical question to be sure, but convention demanded that it be answered. "Yes . . ." Melanie said, trying to keep the way she felt from showing in her voice. "He is . . ."

"I don't know where he gets his good looks from," Gladys said. "Certainly not from me—" Suddenly she gave a start. "The coffee—I forgot to turn it off!"

"I'll get it," Melanie said, thankful for an excuse to flee, and hurried down the stairs.

But, at least from a connoisseur's point of view, the coffee was already a lost cause. Melanie was furious. But by the time Nina and Trudy and Ella arrived she'd calmed down enough to enter into the usual small talk that traditionally preceded the Principal Topic. In fact, she even contributed an item of her own. "What did you think of that charming little broom salesman?" she asked.

Everybody looked at her blankly. "Broom salesman?" Nina said presently.

"Why yes. Didn't he come to your house?"

It was quite obvious, from the

continuing blankness of their faces, that he hadn't. For a moment Melanie's stomach felt as though it was filled with ice cubes. But the feeling passed quickly. Suppose he *had* singled out her door in particular? He could have had any number of logical reasons, or he could have acted on a mere whim.

"I guess you must have missed him," she said. "Anyway, it's not important," she added, and changed the subject.

Changing the subject was not a difficult thing to do, prior to the arrival of the Principal Topic, and shortly the conversation had shifted to this and that and the other thing. The Principal Topic, however, brooked no interference, and if you could not contribute to it constructively, you sat on the sidelines and listened.

Melanie was quite familiar with the sidelines and quite sick of the Principal Topic. All someone had to do was to say one of the key words and it stepped into the room, shouldered aside whatever anyone else had been saying, and dominated the conversation from then on. The key word for today was "high chair," and before she knew what had happened, she found herself hopelessly involved in a verbal swirl of formulas, diapers and pabulum.

She sat through it miserably. She was relieved, as always, when the meeting broke up. She'd never wanted to join the coffee club in the first place, but Fred had kept

insisting and finally she'd given in. At the time she'd thought he was acting out of concern for her, but now she was beginning to suspect his real motive. Probably he had the silly notion that, by subjecting her to an atmosphere that fairly reeked of babies, she might change her mind about having one.

That showed you how much Fred knew about women and about his own wife in particular!

Nevertheless, whether she liked it or not, the baby-club—to call a spade a spade—had become a part of her life and she was going to have to put up with it along with all the other trials and tribulations of modern housewifery, such as Friday night shopping, the budget, TV commercials and door-to-door salesmen—

Whereupon she again found herself face to face with the annoying fact that she was the only housewife in the neighborhood whom Mr. Michelson had approached. *Why?*

Melanie went to the hall closet grimly. She brought the broom into the kitchen and examined it inch by inch. She didn't really think it was a witches'-besom, any more than she really thought she was on a certain party's list of prospective witches, but she knew she wouldn't have any peace of mind till she found out one way or the other.

At first her examination netted her nothing out of the ordinary. Then, on the top of the handle, her fingers discovered a faint indenta-

tion no larger than a pinprick. When she accidentally covered it with her forefinger, a vertical bank of illuminated letters came to life on the upper section of the handle, almost as though she'd activated a secret switch:

F
R
H
I
U
D

The company's name? Well hardly, Melanie thought. No company would employ that much subterfuge just to put its name on its product. Well then, did each of the letters stand for a word? Did F, for instance, stand for Forward, and did R represent Reverse?

Her heart was pounding now. She skipped the H and the I; she'd come back to them later. Right now she was concerned with the last two letters. The U and the D—

Up and Down?

She realized that her hands were trembling. She was breathing hard too, as though she'd just run up six flights of stairs. Could the broom really fly? Could she really go soaring over houses and towns and trees and fields?

With an effort, she brought her imagination back to earth. The way she was acting, you'd think she wanted to be a witch. And she didn't want to be one at all. The only reason she bought so many

witch hats was because they became her, not because of a subconscious urge to fly over the countryside and put people under her spell.

When you came to think of it, though, it would be something, wouldn't it, if she could take off, say, from her bedroom balcony, and go sailing away in the moonlight. Not for sorcerous purposes, of course. Just for fun—

Tonight there'd be a full moon. And tonight was Fred's night to go to the lodge. And tonight she hadn't a single thing to do, except read, or watch TV—

Hmm . . .

The moon *was* full. Melanie didn't think she'd ever seen it quite so full. It was rising behind the backyard apple tree, and from where she stood on the balcony, it looked like a ripe bright fruit that you could pluck if you climbed high enough in the branches.

She'd donned her slinkiest black dress for the occasion and she was wearing her newest witch hat. She realized suddenly how scared she was. Her whole body was trembling.

She canted the broom to what looked like a professional angle. Then a sudden thought occurred to her: did witches straddle a broomstick, or did they ride it side-saddle?

She decided, finally, on side-saddle. For one thing, it was a more lady-like position, and for another, the tightness of her dress precluded the alternative position. She hunch-

ed down till the backs of her thighs touched the handle. Lord, she hoped no one was watching her!

Timidly she touched the tiny indentation—the dashlight?—and waited breathlessly for the vertical bank of letters—the instrument panel?—to light up. Presently FRHIUD stood out distinctly in the darkness. She moved her finger down the column of letters to the U. She hesitated a long time, then, resolutely, she lowered her finger.

She hadn't really expected anything would happen. Just the same, she was disappointed when nothing did. She sighed, and raised her finger. The U, she noticed, had darkened to a dull red. Suddenly she felt light and giddy, and, looking down, she discovered that her feet had lost contact with the balcony floor.

She watched, terrified, while the house shrank to a moonlit matchbox beneath her. Then, frenziedly, she touched the D. When the broom began to drop, she gambled on the H. After she touched it, the broom came to a gentle stop, and there she was, a housewife on a broomstick, hovering high above Tompkinsville in the deliciously dark sky!

Melanie took a deep breath. Tentatively she touched the F, and a wind seemed to spring up around her, and then she saw the slow drifting by of the lights far below and knew that the wind was the result of her own momentum. She took another deep breath. The air was cold and sweet, flavored with

the tang of cider apples and the scent of burning leaves and the winy smell of grapes. Moonlight was everywhere—on fields and forests, on hills and highways; in misted hollows.

Her fright flew away and she began experimenting with the other control-letters. The H was for Hover, of course. But she couldn't figure out what the I stood for. Nothing seemed to happen when she touched it. She shrugged her shoulders. She'd find out later. Right now she had another, more pressing, problem: how did you turn a broomstick?

The answer proved to be simple: you turned a broomstick merely by pointing it in the direction you wished to go. Melanie was enchanted. After considerable practice she was as much at home in the sky as she was in her own kitchen.

On an impulse, she flew back to town and buzzed Fred's lodge. The deserted streets of the business section sobered her: everybody, as usual, was home watching TV, or playing with babies. Even from the perspective of a broomstick, Tompkinsville was a very lonely place at night.

And the sky was lonely too—as lonely as her own living room. She hadn't noticed the loneliness at first, but she did now. There was the distant moon and the remote cold stars, but all the rest was emptiness.

The emptiness seeped into her, the emptiness and the loneliness,

and suddenly she yearned to see the warm yellow light of a window, a window with people beyond it, even people playing with babies . . . especially people playing with babies. Well why not? A witch—even a make-believe one—could do a lot of things an ordinary housewife couldn't.

She chose Gladys' living-room window. Putting the broom at Hover, she peered inside. Gladys' husband was sitting on the couch with the "little man" perched on his lap. Melanie caught her breath. She almost looked away and then she remembered that, since no one was watching her, she could look as long as she wanted to and not have to worry about someone coming up with the inevitable, "Well, what are you and Fred waiting for?"

She had no idea how long she'd been looking when she heard the approaching footsteps. Turning, she saw Gladys cutting across the lawn from Ella's—on an angle that would bring her to within a few feet of Melanie's position in front of the window.

Melanie froze to the broom, too startled to move. She was done for now. But Gladys walked right by her as though she didn't exist. Melanie was dumbfounded; then she remembered touching the I on the instrument panel. She'd wondered at the time why nothing had happened. Now she realized that something *had* happened.

The I stood for Invisibility.

Melanie lingered in front of the living room window till Gladys took the "little man" upstairs; then she raised the broom to the nursery window and watched Gladys tuck him in his crib. Finally, when Gladys turned out the light, Melanie headed for home.

She changed into housecoat and scuffs, descended the stairs and put the broom back in the hall closet. Then she went into the living room, turned on TV and sat down to wait for Fred. "Hi, darling," she said, several programs later when he came in the door, "you're out kind of late, aren't you?"

He didn't even look at her. Instead, he went to the stairs and called up, "Melanie, you in bed already?"

"I'm not in bed, silly, I'm right here," Melanie said. "If I was a mouse, I'd bite you."

"Melanie!" Fred called again. Then, half under his breath: "She must be over to Ella's or Gladys' . . . Left the TV set on too."

Melanie felt quite cold. She sat there disbelievingly while Fred came over and sat down exactly where she was supposed to be. She got up, then, and ran to the hall closet. She found the broom in the darkness and activated the instrument panel. She forced herself to concentrate. Forward and Reverse, she knew, cancelled each other, and Hover cancelled both. The same held true for Up and Down. Conversely, Forward and Reverse or Up and Down cancelled Hover—

But how in the world did you cancel Invisibility?

Melanie swallowed hard. Presently she deactivated the instrument panel and returned to the living room. She sat down on the studio couch and waited helplessly for Fred to worry himself into enough of a dither to call the police.

She didn't have to wait long. By half-past one he was pacing the floor and at two o'clock he called Gladys. Then he called Ella and Nina and Trudy. Finally he said, "Operator, give me the police!" By then his boyish face was pale and he was smoking one cigarette after another. Melanie yearned to go over and put her arms around his neck, and after a while she did; but he only lit another cigarette right where her head was supposed to be, and returned to his pacing.

Well, an hour later, the police came, and Chief Desmond stomped all through the house and all over the yard, telling Fred not to worry, that they'd find her all right, and the neighbors stuck their heads out of their bedroom windows and Gladys came over, and then Ella, and Fred kept chain-smoking and Chief Desmond kept talking, and finally Melanie couldn't stand it any longer and went upstairs to bed. She lay there in the darkness, in the new loneliness of her twin bed, and tried to sleep and couldn't. After a while she heard the police car back out of the drive and pull away, and then she heard Fred come

up and the sound of his shoes dropping on the floor, and presently the sound of his turning and tossing, and finally—sleepless hours later—the clatter of the alarm in the dawn-gray room . . .

She waited till after Fred left for work before she got up. She had a faint hope that perhaps her invisibility had faded during the night, but one glance into her vanity mirror proved that it hadn't. Like Dracula, she had no reflection. But, unlike Dracula, she had no reality either.

There was nothing she could do except wait till Mr. Michelson showed up. She shivered at the thought. She hadn't the faintest doubt but what he could dispell her invisibility with a flick of his finger, but she had a good idea of the price he'd probably ask for the service.

The funny part of it was, she never once thought of the book he'd mentioned till she answered the mailman's ring and saw the oblong package lying on the doorstep. It was postmarked Tompkinsville and bore no return address. She opened it, her fingers trembling. When the last layer of wrapping finally fell away, she found herself holding a handsome, black leather volume entitled *A Handbook for Modern Witches*.

Her instinctive repugnance was tempered by her dilemma. Surely such a book ought to contain some information on the subject of invisibility. She opened it to the table

of contents, scanned the chapter headings eagerly: "How to brew the Ten Basic Concoctions"; "How to cast Spells"; "How to develop an Evil Eye"; "How to dry up a Mother's Milk"; "How to build a Gingerbread House"; "How to turn Playboys into Frogs."

Disappointed, she leafed through the pages, her eyes alert for the words she sought. She'd almost given up hope when at last she found them. They occurred in one of the subtitles of Chapter I:

CONCOCTION NO. 3

A Brew to make you visible after a Broomstick Binge

At first Melanie was afraid she wouldn't have the necessary ingredients, but all of them were available right in her own kitchen. Probably, she thought, getting them together, it was the magic words you repeated while the stuff was boiling that did the trick.

Pretty soon her big Revere-ware pot was full, and bubbling merrily on the Tappan range. The aroma that filled the kitchen was strongly reminiscent of mushroom soup, but that wasn't particularly surprising, considering that the recipe had called for half a can.

Melanie waited till the brew had boiled the stipulated length of time, then she picked up the book and read the magic words:

*"Summer summer, swing and dream
Till you hear a certain scream;*

*Then through fields and forest
flee
Till you reach a certain tree—"*

They didn't make much sense, but the directions said to repeat them twenty times, so she did. As soon as she finished, she ladled out the prescribed dosage into a measuring cup, waited for it to cool, then quickly drank it down.

It didn't taste bad at all. She set the empty cup on the stove and went into the living room and sat down.

Maybe, she thought belatedly, the whole thing was a trick. After all, Mr. Michelson would hardly hand her back her reality free of charge after going to so much trouble to deprive her of it. Maybe, instead of becoming visible, she'd turn into a white swan. Maybe, when Fred came home from work, he'd find a black cat meowing in the kitchen.

But she didn't turn into anything. She just went on sitting there, staring abstractedly at the blank face of the TV screen. It was a 21" screen, rectangular, and utterly unremarkable. However, if you changed its position just a little so that the sun would hit it directly, it would look like a window pane, a window pane, say, in a greenhouse, no different from the other panes except that this particular one was catching the rays of the afternoon sun, and every time your swing swung up, the reflection hit you squarely in the eyes—

Melanie writhed in her chair. No, her mind screamed. No!

—and down and back, now down and up again, the light smiting your eyes and making you squint, and above you in the bedroom, the strange quiet, and beside you in the drive, beneath the same branch of the maple that held your swing, the doctor's car—

And then the scream shattering the serenity of the summer day and the serenity of your thoughts, and the swing, seemingly by itself, losing its back and forth momentum and coming slowly to a standstill in the shade, and the greenhouse window forgotten, everything forgotten, except the scream still hovering in the summer air . . .

When the doctor had driven in the drive, you'd wanted to look in his black bag, thinking that maybe it contained your new baby brother. But the doctor brushed you aside and hurried into the house where your father was walking back and forth, and then you heard the two of them mounting the stairs to your mother's bedroom, and, bewildered, you returned to your swing.

Back and forth . . . up and down . . . and then the scream—

It was seven summers, sitting there, waiting for the scream to go away. But it wouldn't go away and finally you couldn't stand it any longer and you ran ran ran, down the lane to the blackberry patch and through the patch, the thorns scraping your little girl's legs, to the woods; and through the woods to

the special place beneath the big oak where you always took your frustrations and your fears. And you'd sat there all through the summer afternoon, whimpering and trembling, till finally your father had found you at sundown and had carried you back to the house.

You'd just known your mother was dead—but she wasn't. And there in her arms was your long-awaited baby brother. But at first you couldn't look at him, because looking at him brought the scream back. Looking at other babies brought it back, too. But gradually, through the years, the scream had become other things: it had become books your mother said you were too young to read; it had become dresses your mother said you looked mannish in; it had become dates you walked home from; it had become the subject of your senior theme, "Thomas Robert Malthus, The Forgotten Man"; it had become a pre-marital discourse on the inadvisability of taking on the responsibilities of parenthood too early in life—

Finally it had become a penchant for witch hats.

The greenhouse window had resumed its role as a TV screen, and the long-ago summer day had absconded. The scream had died away forever, but another sound had come to take its place. Melanie sat up with a start. Someone was rapping, gently rapping, rapping at her kitchen door . . .

"Well," Mr. Michelson said, sniffing the aromatic vapors of Concoction No. 3 through the screen. "I see the book I sent arrived all right."

"Can—can you *see* me?" Melanie asked.

"I certainly can . . . Aren't you going to ask me in?"

"No." Melanie got the broom from the closet, picked up *A Handbook for Modern Witches* from the kitchen table, and opened the door just wide enough to hand them through. "I've changed my mind. I don't want to be a witch!"

"Well, that *is* good news!" Mr. Michelson took out a snow-white handkerchief and wiped his pink forehead. "You had me worried for a while," he went on. "The way you were flying around last night, I thought you were a goner for sure. In fact, I was afraid that even the antidote wouldn't snap you out of it, in which case, of course, I'd have had to insist on your signing the contract. My worthy opponent and I have a gentlemen's agreement on that point. When I use his tactics—and in your case, they were the only tactics that would have worked—I have to turn all the souls I'm unable to rehabilitate over to him. And vice versa."

"Your—your worthy opponent?"

"Why yes. You've heard of him, I'm sure. My father had a great deal of trouble with him way back when. Put him to rout, too . . . Well—" Mr. Michelson tucked the book under his arm and picked up the broom—"I guess that just about wraps it up."

He descended the steps and started down the drive to his car. Melanie slipped out on the backporch and watched him around the corner of the house. That was when she finally put her finger on what the oddness was about the hump on his back. It wasn't really one hump at all: it was two humps, one on each shoulder . . .

"Wait!" she cried.

Mr. Michelson turned. "Yes?"

"Is— isn't there some way I can repay you?"

Mr. Michelson's blue eyes seemed to twinkle. "As a matter of fact, there is," he said. "If the first one's a boy—"

He walked the rest of the way down the drive and climbed into his blue Ford. Melanie stared after him, her face aflame. Just before he drove away he rolled down the window and leaned out.

"You can call him 'Mike' for short," he said.



parlor game

by . . . Ron Goulart

Luanne made it almost a challenge. She really was pretty. And there were so few women on Prospero II.

"OFF to the jungle," Hawley scrawled across the memo pad, and gathering up his briefcase, he jumped out the rear window of the Earth Embassy. Orange dust splashed high as he ran down the narrow alley toward the outskirts of town. From behind he heard the mahogany door of his office, flown all the way from Earth, splinter.

By the time the round pink natives of Prospero II came out the window after him Hawley was into the shoulder-high grass beyond the Embassy warehouse. Running with his head down slowed him and made breathing tougher.

Across the warm afternoon came the cries of the angry natives. Hawley even thought he heard the raspy voice of their Prime Minister yelling, "Death and destruction!" Maybe not. When he'd spotted them coming across the courtyard toward the embassy none of them seemed to have neckties.

"Good thing Collins is in the North Country," Hawley muttered. One deep breath and he dived into the shadows at the jungle's edge, bending even lower, with his briefcase up against his chest, schoolgirl fashion.

Ron Goulart, now free-lancing, writes that he sold his first SF story in 1952 and his second in 1957. Inbetween, he edited the humor magazine at the University of California and spent two and one-half years as a copywriter in a San Francisco agency—writing mostly about peanut butter. . . .

The revolutionists didn't seem to be shouting as much anymore. Or as near. Still Hawley kept running.

Twenty-four hours of ripe fruit and pond water slowed Hawley to a trot. For nearly twenty-three hours he'd heard no sound of pursuit. Quite deep in the jungle of Prospero II now, he wasn't completely sure where he was. By a bush covered with large yellow flowers he sat down, dropping his briefcase near his scuffed left shoe.

This afternoon was cool and Hawley buttoned his coat again. Leaning back against a fallen dead tree he slowly drew his tie out of his collar and tossed it away into the brush.

Gradually, with eyes half-closed, Hawley realized that the tie might be a clue to anyone who decided to trail him. He got up and went into the brush after it, squinting for a sign of red stripe.

Only a few steps from the dead tree he dropped suddenly into the ground. He landed with his right ankle under him, and even in his surprise he knew he had a sprain.

The grass was about five feet above him now, very yellow in the flashes of sunlight through the leaves. Hawley swore and decided to take off his shoe before too much swelling started in his ankle.

He stood in the hole, one shoe dangling in his hand, for over an hour trying to determine the best way to get up and out with his sprained ankle.

Hawley always carried a pack of

Earth cigarettes in his briefcase. He got it out and began smoking while he thought.

Just as soft twilight showed above the hole, water splashed down on Hawley. "Damn it, anyway," he said, throwing away his soggy cigarette butt.

Taking it easy on his bad foot he went up on tiptoe and watched the opening above. Maybe this was a native trap and they were planning to drown him, slowly, by stages.

"You're not a ground sloth," said a girl's voice.

Hawley frowned up.

"And you're not on fire." A girl was on her knees at the hole edge, her long chestnut hair hanging almost into it. "You're not one of those natives from faraway, either."

"I'm from the Earth Embassy and I think I've broken my leg."

The girl bit her forefinger. "Oh, I'm sorry." She disappeared.

"Hey, what the hell," shouted Hawley.

"You should watch your language," the girl said, dropping a vine rope down to him. "Now you grab hold and I'll pull you up."

Hawley took the rope carefully and then the girl, gritting her teeth, yanked him up onto the ground.

Helping Hawley to sit on the dead tree she said, "Actually, that's a trap I made for a ground sloth. I try to fix sloth every couple of weeks. It's good for your eyesight."

Hawley looked at the girl in the failing daylight. She was slender,

very tan, and tall. Almost as tall as Hawley, and he was over five feet eight. She was wearing some kind of short dress made of blue caribou skin and held in at the waist with a leather cord. Nice legs. Hawley picked up his briefcase, took his shoe out of his pocket and put it inside. "I'm Ralph Hawley. With the Earth Embassy."

The girl smiled shyly. "My name is Luanne Horner." She coiled the vine rope and put it over her shoulder. "Well, I can't leave you out all night. You'll get all covered with dew." She rubbed her chin. "Your leg isn't broken, I'd say, probably just a sprain."

"It hurts," Hawley said. "My foot at least."

Luanne nodded. "I'll let you stay in my hut." Stepping toward him she added, "You're not afraid of high places?"

"No. Just yesterday I jumped out of a second-floor window."

"Oh, yes, buildings." Luanne took Hawley's arm and helped him up. "Easy now. We only have about two miles to go. Then I'll have you up into the hut."

"You live in a tree or what?"

"A tree." She guided him to a path through the brush. "Come on, through here. Everything'll be okay."

Putting his briefcase in his outside hand, Hawley rested his other hand on Luanne's smooth shoulder. "Thanks," he said, squeezing her shoulder.

The girl stopped angrily and

shrugged his hand off. "Don't do that again," she said.

He didn't.

Hawley looked from his bandaged ankle to Luanne across the room. The girl was sitting cross-legged on a grass mat, her eyes not quite meeting his. "*Fire and Brimstone*," she said.

"Uh huh," Hawley said. "What else?"

"He wrote a book about married life called *The Straight and Narrow Way*."

Hawley shook his head. "Funny, I never heard of him. Sydney Smith Horner. No, can't place it." He touched at his bandage. "I'm supposed to know most Earth writers, you know. It's good for Public Relations. This is my first post."

"I'm sorry the natives got angry with you, Mr. Hawley," Luanne said.

"This is the second revolution in the year and a half I've been here. The first one they were for us and they chased after the Mars Embassy gang." He clenched his fist. "You hate to have so many revolutions on your first assignment with the Foreign Service."

"You can't help it. Natives here are vicious and nasty. I know." She looked down.

"I'm sorry. I don't want to get you to thinking about your folks again. Sorry I asked at all."

"Don't be." She stood, pulling her hair back and tying it with a strip of red leather. "That's why I've stayed

here in the jungle by myself all these years. The natives and all."

"You like it?"

"Certainly." She smiled directly at him.

A night bird flew by the half-opened window.

"Leg feels fine now," Hawley said.

"I'm glad," Luanne answered, still smiling a little. "This is my parlor. You will sleep here, of course. I'll get you a quilt."

Hawley watched her walk lightly into another room.

When she came back with a blanket of vari-colored scraps of caribou skin Hawley said, "You're very pretty, Luanne."

The quilt dropped heavily on his sprained ankle as Luanne stepped back, pale. She swallowed. "You should never talk about things like that, Mr. Hawley. Physical details."

Hawley picked the blanket gingerly off his foot. "Sorry. Anyway, I do appreciate the aid you've given me," he said, falling back on his diplomatic stock. "I really am very grateful. If I've offended you, such was not my intent."

Luanne murmured, "Very well." She crossed to a cane table. Took a long leather cord from a pile and a few short sticks from a hand-made box. "I hope you won't be offended if I take certain precautions, Mr. Hawley."

Hawley watched for several minutes before he realized what Luanne was doing. In under a half-hour she made a sort of primitive lock, simi-

lar to the one on the front door of the tree hut. After attaching the lock to her bedroom door with the help of some home-made tools Luanne said, "You know where the primrose path leads, Mr. Hawley. Good night, sleep well."

"Oh, yes, only too well, where it leads," Hawley said, careful to look grave until she was out of the parlor and locked away for the night.

Grinning thoughtfully, Hawley pulled the quilt up nearly to his chin.

It had only occurred to him vaguely before. But Luanne made it almost a challenge. She really was very pretty. Tan all over, nice legs. Hawley decided to try. There were very few Earth women on Prospero II.

A night bird began singing as Hawley fell asleep.

Hearing Luanne land lightly on the platform outside, Hawley sat up, awake. He blinked and brushed at his crewcut to smooth it out.

The lock rattled and Luanne came in with a basket of assorted fruit. "Sleeping late is a sign of laxity, Mr. Hawley."

"After a twenty-four-hour run I often take long naps," Hawley said, finding he had stubble all over his face.

"You can use my father's razors, Mr. Hawley," said Luanne, watching his fingers. "They were given to him by the students of his first missionary school on Venus at the successful completion of their course of study."

"I was thrown out of college once for attacking my forestry professor,

who happened to be a ravishing woman," Hawley said, trying to get up.

"I'll help you rise, but no tricks, Mr. Hawley."

Hawley was careful not to touch Luanne as he got to his feet.

When he came back from washing up she said to him, "I know it's my fault about your foot, Mr. Hawley, but I wish you'd check your language." She washed the last of the fruit in a basin of water.

"It's being with you, Luanne," Hawley said, running back through his memory of courses at Diplomacy School. "It makes me speak strangely. Why, just this morning I was saying to myself, 'Hawley,' I said, 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may, old time is still a-flying.' Then I said, 'And this same flower that smiles today, tomorrow will be dying.'"

Wiping an orange-colored fruit on a white cloth, Luanne said, "That's odd all right."

"Fair daffodils, we weep to see you waste away so soon," Hawley said, watching the sunlight on the broad green leaves beyond the shuttered window. "About how old are you, Luanne?"

"Just twenty-one," she said, cutting a round green fruit in half.

"That old? And you've been here alone in the jungle since you were twelve. All these long years. Time is fleeting."

"Twenty-one isn't old. Let's have some lunch. You slept through breakfast."

Hawley went to the cane table.

"Myself, I'm twenty-eight and filled with regrets." He sat and turned to face the plate Luanne was bringing. "Anyway, Luanne, I think we should be friends. Okay?"

"Oh, certainly." She sat opposite him. "Try those little plums there."

"Let's shake on it," Hawley said, extending his hand across the table.

Luanne hesitated, then held out her hand.

Hawley bowed and turned the girl's hand up to kiss it. "Mighty lak a rose," he said.

Luanne's chair tumbled against the window shutters as she jumped away. She carried Hawley with her part way by the hand before she was all free.

"I warned you about lust," Luanne cried.

Hawley winced and rearranged the scattered fruit. "It's hot blood, I guess. Please forgive me."

Luanne's nostrils flared. "Certain coarse acts are unforgivable." She opened the front door of the parlor and jumped for a vine without bothering to lock up.

"Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour," Hawley said, watching Luanne swing away through the trees. He wished he could stop thinking of this thing as a challenge, because he realized he might possibly not bring it off.

"Pacing is bad for a bad foot," Luanne said, swinging in at the open window.

"You've been gone almost a day," Hawley said, stopping. "You mad?"

"I was busy. How's your foot?" She sat on the window ledge, her long tan legs pointing straight out into the parlor.

"Better." He moved in her direction. "Are you mad?"

"No, Mr. Hawley. Disappointed. When I was a girl the men at the Earth Embassies were gentlemen." She dropped into the room, glancing at the empty fruit bowl. "I thought you'd have enough to eat." Luanne slowly slid out a chair and sat down in it.

"Oh, yes." Hawley sat in the other chair, deciding to pick things up again. "Look, Luanne, I know we just met. But, really, ever since I fell into your ground sloth pit, or at least from the time I looked up and saw you looking down, well, I've liked you."

Luanne walked over to the door of her room.

"I've been sitting here thinking we should be friends," Hawley said.

Luanne undid the band around her hair and let it fall. "Fine."

"Good. I thought maybe tonight we could walk in the jungle, watch the moon."

"Oh, no, Mr. Hawley." Her hair brushed the far edges of her shoulders when she shook her head.

"Stop calling me, Mr. Hawley, damn it."

Luanne's head shook more slowly. "Very well. I'll call you Ralph. And that will be the extent of our friendship." She went into her room and closed the door, but she didn't lock it.

The day he found he could walk pretty well Hawley remembered his necktie. If the natives were belligerent enough to follow him into the jungle the tie might help them out. He was walking in a small circle just below the dangling end of the vine ladder that led up into Luanne's tree hut when he thought of the tie. Luanne had swung off into the jungle again because of something he said at breakfast about a rose that once has bloomed. He'd gotten up in time for breakfast for two days running. He was thinking that he'd probably misquoted the line anyway and was still pretty far from breaking down Luanne and then the tie popped up.

Deciding not to wait until Luanne came back, which might be another day if there was a pattern to her anger, Hawley went up the ladder and left her a note on a piece of Embassy bond from his briefcase.

The beginning of the path that led back to the ground sloth trap wasn't hard to find. But later on in the jungle Hawley lost the trail. He was fairly certain of the direction, though, so he kept pushing ahead through the brush.

Hawley was stopped behind a great orange fern taking a deep breath when he heard the angry voices. He stooped, trying not to make any of the dry things around him snap, and peeked cautiously through the fern. He saw, sure enough, a half-dozen round pink revolutionists standing in the clearing a few yards from his fern. The

one Hawley was pretty sure used to make speeches standing on an empty lard drum in the City Courtyard was holding up Hawley's maroon and gray tie.

Another of the natives, a fellow with a rusty sword, laughed, which Hawley resented.

The ringleader raised his voice and said, "Death to tyrants!"

Hawley assumed they were still discussing him. Hoping he remembered enough details of a lecture on Jungle Warfare he'd heard two years before at the Mars Y Hawley dropped to his hands and knees and began crawling away, back toward Luanne's hut.

He maintained utter silence, even while creeping across a thistle bed. Toward sundown he toppled quietly out of the jungle and crawled to the tree that held the hut. Hawley realized he had to stand to grab the ladder. Looking thoroughly over his shoulder he stretched up, grabbed the bottom rung, and shot up to the platform.

Giving a little over a second to catch his breath he yanked the ladder up into a haphazard coil and tried to hide it under the grass welcome mat.

Inside the hut, which he'd crawled into, there was no sign of Luanne.

In the final moments of light, Hawley decided on one more try and he slipped out the back way to wash up.

Luanne dropped the small green guanaco on a mat and frowned at Hawley. "Haven't had guanaco for a week. I thought maybe a pot roast.

It'll take a couple hours, in case you're really hungry. Why are your clothes all shredded, Ralph?"

Hawley hitched his chair forward so that his face was in the lamplight. Looking at Luanne intently, he said, "The grave's a fine and private place, but none, I think, do there embrace." His voice caught as he finished.

"That's morbid," Luanne said and unsheathed her hunting knife, which said *Property of Inter-Galactic Missionary Society* on its dark handle. "What about your clothes?"

With one hand gripping his chair Hawley stood up. "At my back I always hear time's winged chariot hurrying near."

"You're just not used to the jungle at night. It's full of odd noises at first." She squatted and began to skin the guanaco. "No, really, don't you want to tell me?"

"Well, I don't know how, Luanne." He stepped toward her. "You see, this may be our last night. I hate to mention it, but I've been followed into the jungle."

"By natives," Luanne said, not looking up.

"Today I went for a stroll in the jungle. Very pleasant. Flowers in bloom, unaware that soon they'd fade."

Luanne turned and pointed her knife at him. "You did what? Why were you stumbling around out there by yourself?"

"I wasn't stumbling, I was crawling. See, I'd lost my tie out there when I fell in your sloth pit. I didn't

want anybody to find it so I went back for it."

"You idiot!"

"And they are after me. I saw them. A horde of them, Luanne. They may be here at any moment." This was where he'd intended to take her in his arms. He hadn't figured on the knife. "In these last few minutes before we are destroyed I'd like to take you in my arms, Luanne. We'll face death together, two in love, unafraid." He was worried now himself, thinking back on the rusty sword.

"Keep your distance, Ralph," Luanne said. She wiped the knife and then put it between her teeth. "Get me the roast pot while I wash some vegetables." She motioned him to the kitchen.

"Luanne, darling, we face death. Couldn't you sort of let up a little. We could hold hands or something."

The knife blade caught first the lamplight, then the moonlight from the window. "Get that pot, Ralph. Now, come on."

Hawley went into the kitchen. "Doesn't imminent annihilation bother you? Make you a little tender?" he asked over his shoulder.

Luanne was a few steps behind him. "It's a wonder you didn't fall into the traps, clumsy as you are." She took several blue carrots from a wooden bin.

"What traps?" Hawley found the roast pot.

"You simpleton. I had this all planned. I thought they might follow you. Your native pursuers are

all in the bottom of a twelve-foot pit. That's what I've been doing this past week. Mining this area, so to speak."

"Are they dead?"

"No. But I think your tie is ruined." She smiled and sliced a carrot into circles. "A day or two in the pit and they'll cool off. Then I'll send them back home. This happens now and then."

Hawley looked down into the empty pot. "I guess you wouldn't care to embrace in celebration of our close escape?"

"We won't talk silly anymore," Luanne said, her smile gone.

Hawley was wiggling his toes in the sunshine by the parlor window and looking down through the various greens and oranges of the plant life outside. He decided he looked pretty good in the yellow caribou skin Luanne had fixed him up with. He popped suddenly half out the window. "My word!" he shouted. "Hey, Collins!"

Collins pushed back his Embassy-crested pith helmet and stared up. "Ralph, boy! Are you a captive?" He made his loyal native bearers halt. "We put down the revolt when I got back from the North, boy."

Hawley was coming down the ladder agilely. "Good work, Robert."

Puffing, Collins said, "I saw your memo and decided to track you."

"You're tattered," Hawley said, noticing Collins' white shorts.

"You know me. I kept falling in holes all the way out here." He

puffed again. "If you hadn't called I probably wouldn't have seen you at all. I'm awkward as hell in the wilderness."

"The pits are because of Luanne," Hawley said.

Collins squinted up at the tree hut and then at Hawley's yellow costume. "Who's Luanne?"

When Hawley had briefed Collins on the situation of the past two weeks he sent him a mile or so into the jungle to wait. Hawley was determined to make one last try with Luanne.

"Don't you like your caribou outfit?" Luanne asked, sailing in through the window that afternoon.

Hawley tightened the belt on his ragged Diplomatic uniform, wishing he had his lost tie. "Luanne, my dear, I'm afraid this must be good-bye."

Luanne inhaled quickly. "You're angry?"

Hawley wiped his eyes and gave a tight smile. "Oh, to be torn twixt love and duty." He held out his arms, open wide. "My people have come for me, Luanne. The revolt's over and I must return to my true calling. This is good-bye."

Luanne touched her hair absently. "That's good I suppose. You never did get oriented to the jungle."

"Well, couldn't we kiss each other good-bye?" Hawley was still holding his arms out.

"Don't spoil things, Ralph. You know I'm fond of you. I want to remember you always as a friend. Despite your vulgarity, you're not a bad fellow."

Gambling, Hawley said, "We'll probably never meet again."

Luanne smiled vaguely. "Oh, if you're ever in the jungle you're welcome to drop in."

Hawley moved up a pace. "Luanne, why don't you come back to the city with me?"

"Ralph, don't ruin our last meeting with crude suggestions like that. I have no intention of living in sin with you or anyone else."

Before he thought about it, Hawley said, "Sin, hell! Why don't you marry me then?"

Luanne sniffed, her eyes sparkling. "That's very nice, Ralph. Are you serious?"

"Well, sure." Hawley stopped talking. "Oh, yes, Luanne, sure."

Inching ahead, he said, softly, "Now, can we relax restrictions a little?"

Luanne laughed happily. "Of course, Ralph," she said. And with great abandon she stepped forward and kissed him on the cheek.



citizen meekle

by . . . Sam Rosenfeld

What happens when a little man who isn't aggressive—but who does dream—finally makes a startling discovery?

JONAH C. MEEKLE sat at his desk and stared blankly at the seven or eight men and women that worked with him. It was just before the fifteen-minute morning break, and Mr. Meekle was bemoaning his lot in life.

He wasn't an aggressive man. As a matter of fact, he was the kind of man who always got the table in the far corner and then apologized to the waiter for his trouble. But there existed in this insignificant being the longing for achievement and grandeur that is a basic desire in all mankind.

He was becoming angry at his minor existence, and was ready to get up and release his anger on the water fountain by his usual method of giving it an extra hard twist. At that moment, one of the men approached his desk and said, "It's my turn today—what'll it be?"

Quickly snapping out of his day dreams, Mr. Meekle asked in his maddeningly indecisive manner, "What are the others having, Mr. Adams?"

"It's kinda hot—we're getting sodas."

"All right then, please make mine cherry soda," said Mr. Mee-

Sam Rosenfeld, who now teaches in a Long Island high school, was working as an explosives chemist in Indiana when the War broke out, and then at the Air Force Research Center at Wright Field, as a civilian. He returned there later as an Air Force Lieutenant, in charge of fuels and oils research.

kle, carefully placing a dime on the desk.

Mr. Adams took the coin, picked up some empty bottles, and went whistling down the stairs.

Mr. Meekle drifted back to his day dreams. In these thoughts, he even talked back to his boss, Mr. Farnum, and to his big, over-bearing wife, who pulled him around like a dog on a leash.

Just then, Mrs. Fenley, two desks in front of him, dropped her keys to the floor, bent over, and picked them up.

Seeing this, Mr. Meekle, who was also in his dreams a great inventor, actually the greatest inventor that ever lived, called to her, "Why waste effort in bending down and picking up the keys? Why not just lower a magnet on a string? That'll do the job."

Mrs. Fenley just laughed and continued her work.

Mr. Meekle's hobby was science. He read science books and articles every chance he could. He had even put together a small laboratory in his basement. And, just as Sir Isaac Newton wondered about the apple that fell on his head, Jonah C. Meekle now started to wonder about the magnet picking up those keys.

"The south pole of one magnet will attract the north pole of another magnet." He had performed this experiment many times, and he inwardly reveled at his scientific knowledge.

"But the north pole of one magnet will repel the north pole of an-

other magnet and, likewise, the south poles will repel each other." This, too, was an established fact and, again, he was gloriously happy with his knowledge.

"And," he thought while waiting for his soda, "in the field of electricity, unlike charges attract each other, whereas like charges repel each other."

This now insignificant, but soon great, man was now arriving at the conclusion that was to change the entire course of his, and many other lives:

"Sir Isaac Newton stated that whatever falls is attracted to the earth through a force called gravity. Therefore, since nature is orderly in its laws, objects that fall due to gravitational attraction must have a charge *opposite* to that of the earth."

Now came the big question.

"Why is there only gravitational attraction? Where is the *repulsion* of like gravitational charges?"

Mr. Meekle became excited. If he could only find the like pole of the earth, then, instead of being *attracted*, an object would be *repelled*. Just then, Mr. Adams arrived with the sodas, interrupting his thoughts.

He placed the box of sodas on the unoccupied desk in front of Mr. Meekle, removed the bottle caps, and lined the sodas up on the desk.

"Funny," said Mr. Meekle, "out of eight of us here, three ordered cokes, two ginger ales, two oranges, and one cherry soda."

And then he froze in his seat!

He stared, with open mouth, at the bottles lined up on the desk. He got up and crept closer to the desk—still staring at the sodas.

Breathing hard and fast, he mumbled, "That's it! I'm sure that's it!"

Mrs. Fenley, alarmed at Mr. Meekle's excited appearance, shouted, "What's it? What's wrong? Are you feeling all right?"

Trembling, Mr. Meekle sat down in his seat and weakly sputtered, "It's all right; everything's fine—fine—everything's fine—"

What sharp Mr. Meekle had noticed, was that the bubbles in the cherry soda were rising faster than the bubbles in any of the other sodas!

Finally he regained some of his composure, and everybody continued their tasks, forgetting the disturbance, as is usual in offices where people let routine take over.

However, Mr. Meekle fidgeted in his seat until five o'clock. At last it came.

He hurried down the steps, into the street, and into the packed subway, never noticing the crowds—so anxious was he to get home.

Arriving at his stop, he got off the train, raced up the steps, and over to a refreshment store.

"Ten bottles of cherry soda, please, one bottle of ginger ale, one orange soda, one lime, one coke, and one grape—and hurry," blurted Mr. Meekle, startled at his own brashness. This was the first time

he had ever asserted himself even in a minor way.

The storekeeper placed the fifteen bottles inside a paper bag. "O.K., sir, here they are."

Mr. Meekle paid cheerfully and took his bulky package. He half-ran the three blocks to his home.

After grappling for his key, he hurriedly opened the door and, clutching his precious package before him, ran down the center hall toward the basement at the other end.

At this moment, Mrs. Meekle, the great big Mrs. Meekle, stepped from the kitchen into the center hall.

The laws of physics state that two objects cannot take up the same space at the same time. Unfortunately, this law was about to operate now.

Mr. Meekle met Mrs. Meekle—suddenly—and with great momentum obtained by a running start of about fifteen feet.

One hundred and thirty-eight pounds of Mr. Meekle (plus package) thus knocked one hundred and sixty-three pounds of Mrs. Meekle flat on her rug.

"Excuse me, excuse me," he babbled, "I've got to get to that basement."

For the first time, the considerate Mr. Meekle didn't bother to cringe, bluster, or do something to alleviate his wife's predicament. She struggled to her feet in a mad rage, fists shaking, and ran toward the base-

ment screaming, "I'll show you, you weasel! I'll show you!"

Just as she reached the top of the basement steps, Mr. Meekle slammed the door shut and locked it. Mrs. Meekle pounded her fists in vain upon the door, screaming wildly, "I'll show you—you—you—" Then, realizing the damage she was causing her hand, and also realizing something was amiss, since her husband had never acted this way before, she subsided and, muttering, went back to her chores to await a later revenge.

Meanwhile, Mr. Meekle, completely oblivious to what he had done, put on the basement light, unwrapped his precious bundle, and gazed in anticipatory glee at his fifteen bottles of soda. He found a rusty bottle opener and quickly opened the bottles.

He observed intently.

"There it is again!" he shouted in a sort of hysterical glee, "The bubbles in the cherry soda rise faster than the bubbles in any of the other sodas!"

The great mind now concluded, "The bubbles are rising faster in the cherry soda than in the other sodas because they're being repelled by the earth's force of gravity. There's something in the cherry soda bubbles that has the same gravitational charge as the earth, causing them to be repelled. I, Mr. Meekle, am going to isolate it and concentrate it," he said grandly and dramatically.

Mr. Meekle now really set to

work. Collecting gases, boiling, concentrating, extracting—he went through everything in the book. He tried method after method, becoming more and more excited. He changed methods, invented methods, combined methods, and kept on working feverishly.

At intervals, Mrs. Meekle pounded on the door and shouted, "Supper is ready. Come out, you weasel! Come out!" But Mr. Meekle didn't even hear, for when a great man concentrates, all else is forgotten except the task before him.

Mr. Meekle worked and remained in that basement for two whole days and nights—never sleeping, never eating. At 10 A.M. of the third day, he let out a wild scream of triumph. He had it! He had isolated the ingredient in the cherry soda bubbles that had the same charge as the earth's gravity!

By sheer ingenuity, Mr. Meekle had concentrated it and, using beeswax, had put it in ointment form inside of a wide-mouthed bottle.

And did it repel!

When he had first made the ointment, it almost flew out of his hand due to the strong repulsion from the earth. Now, with a full, tightly-capped bottle of the wonderful stuff in his hand he had a difficult time holding it down. In fact, the strain was starting to tell on him. He thought quickly. All magnets have two opposite poles, one on each end. Perhaps, this too—well, it was worth a try.

Slowly he turned the bottle upside-down, and sure enough, the opposite pole of the bubble ingredient was attracted to the earth in the normal action of gravity. On the other hand, by turning it right side up, there was once more a strong repulsion, and the bottle started to float upwards; but, Mr. Meekle, now on the alert, caught it in time and quickly turned it upside-down where, once again, it behaved with normal gravitational attraction.

Ideas were coming quickly to Mr. Meekle: "If an entire steel bar can be magnetized from one point, if a copper wire can be electrified from one point, what will happen if I rub some bubble ingredient on myself?"

Mr. Meekle rubbed some of the ointment on his face.

Nothing happened.

A terrible sweat broke out over poor Mr. Meekle's face. His shoulders started to droop again—but only for an instant.

"Of course, of course," he cried to no one in particular, "I rubbed the ointment in a *downward* direction, thus lining up the poles opposite to the earth, causing normal gravitational attraction. I simply must rub the ointment *upwards*," he said almost desperately, feeling it was his last chance for success.

Carefully holding the bottle upside-down, he took some of the ointment from the jar and rubbed it on his cheekbones—upwards. No sooner had he rubbed some on,

than—wham!—he rose so swiftly, his head hit the ceiling with a thud that almost knocked him senseless. A small amount of the bubble ingredient had charged his whole body with exactly the same gravitational polarity as the earth.

He carefully took a tiny bit more bubble ingredient and rubbed it downwards, hoping to neutralize some of the repulsion. It worked, he was floating in air!

Mr. Meekle then experimented with ordinary objects. He rubbed a bit of the bubble ingredient on a chair. Up it went! Trying various other objects, the results were the same.

Mr. Meekle sang out loud as he floated, for a happier man was nowhere to be found. At last the insignificant Mr. Meekle with pent-up dreams of accomplishment had done something to be proud of. Now people would notice him. Now he'd show them who he was. It seemed that the moment success came to him, all the tortures of his insecurity and fear of people and life seemed to vanish.

Nevertheless, he was still having his troubles. It's nice to float in air, but how do you float forwards? In fact, right now he'd settle for backwards.

But nothing can stop success. Mr. Meekle rubbed a bit more of the ointment on his face. Floating to the ceiling, he pulled himself over to a shelf where he had once stored a pair of web-shaped rubber flippers—the kind used by skin divers

to propel themselves under water. He tried to take his shoes off, but it was tough balancing himself. It was like learning to tread water or to swim.

After some minutes of practice, Mr. Meekle caught the knack of maneuvering himself, and kicked off his shoes, replacing them with the web-shaped flippers. He practiced floating back and forth, right and left, using the rubber flippers as a duck uses its webbed feet to move in water.

After two hours, he was quite adept at moving about in his new medium. It was now three o'clock in the afternoon and Mr. Meekle, the excitement of success abating, began to feel the pangs of hunger. He placed the jar of bubble ingredient into his jacket pocket and, with a joyous flip, sailed up the basement stairs as slick as a bird. He unlocked the door and floated into the center hall flipping his flippers.

At this moment, Mrs. Meekle stepped into the center hall, took one look at Mr. Meekle floating in the air above her, and promptly passed out cold.

She lay there in a heap. And what a heap, thought the new Mr. Meekle as he floated into the kitchen for some water. Filling a large pitcher with cold water, he floated over to Mrs. Meekle and poured it on her face to revive her.

Revive her it did, but only for two and one-half seconds, for, no

sooner did she see him floating in air than she passed out again.

After reviving her for the fifth time, it seemed to take, although she was still dazed and spoke incoherently about "angels in the house." Mr. Meekle led her to a chair in the kitchen.

He was still floating.

Mrs. Meekle sat motionless, staring, while her husband heated up some of the strongly spiced meat loaf his wife always made, and which he never ate for fear of heartburn. He gulped it down with nary a burp. Success had even placated his stomach.

It was 3:45 P.M. now, and Mr. Meekle decided it was time for action.

Leaving his wife still motionless and staring in her chair, Mr. Meekle floated out of the house and into the street. He had found that by using his flippers properly he could go high or low and in any direction, just like he did in the ocean.

Living in a residential section of town, nobody saw him at first. Most of it happened as he approached the business district. A few people hurrying somewhere happened to glance up as a shadow hit their eyes.

The newspapers later estimated that in that first half-hour along the business district, 243 women and 172 men passed out cold, and 347 women and men (they didn't know exactly how many of each) were injured rushing down subway steps and into hallways and stores

to escape. It was announced that the traffic tie-up was the worst in the history of recorded mankind.

Mr. Meekle enjoyed his newly-found power but, not really being heartless, and not wishing to do any harm to people, he quickly scooted out of the district and down a deserted street, floating just below the roof lines.

Mr. Meekle was not heartless—but he was human. Being human, he thought about his job and his boss, Mr. Farnum.

How he boiled! For twenty-two years Mr. Meekle had been a clerk. Not once had Mr. Meekle dared ask for a raise. Not once had he ever dared disagree with the boss. Even the other employees didn't dare disagree with Mr. Farnum, but especially Mr. Meekle because of his fears of everybody and everything. A plan now materialized in his mind.

He removed his jar of bubble ingredient and rubbed himself down to earth. Replacing the jar inside his jacket, he nonchalantly walked towards his office, up the flight of stairs, and into his place of employment, appearing as innocent as—Mr. Meekle.

He courteously answered his colleagues' questions as to where he had been the past few days by saying truthfully, "I sort of felt my stomach was up in the air." He graciously received their clucks of sympathy, and turned the corridor toward the boss' office. At the far end was a frosted glass door with

large gold letters on it spelling out, "MR. FARNUM."

Being around the corner, nobody ever knew when Mr. Farnum would appear. During the lunch hour session down at the corner cafeteria, this curse had often been bitterly discussed, and Mrs. Fenley fervently believed that this was the cause of her ulcers.

But right at this moment, it was a blessing to Mr. Meekle for the plan he had in mind. Thus hidden from his colleagues, he donned his flippers and placed his shoes into a large pocket which he had sewn inside his jacket. He then applied the ointment and again floated in air. He adjusted himself to a point about six feet in the air, opened his employer's door without knocking, and floated in.

Mr. Farnum, hearing the door open, half-rose, looked up and, seeing Mr. Meekle, shouted, "How dare you enter without—with-out—"

He never finished the sentence. He merely sat down hard in his seat staring at Mr. Meekle.

Mr. Farnum, however, had nerves of steel, and soon collected his wits.

"Mr. Meekle, you're floating in air! That's impossible. It's ridiculous. Get down immediately."

"I'm not floating in air," said Mr. Meekle, calmly. "That would be quite impossible."

"But you are—you are!" said Mr. Farnum with an incredulous look on his face. "I know you are. I see you."

"No you don't," insisted Mr. Meekle.

"You can't do this to me," croaked Mr. Farnum. "I'll prove it. I'll call in the other employees."

"That won't prove it. They won't dare disagree with anything you say," said the great psychologist, with hidden elation. This was the very moment he had been waiting for. "Call them in and satisfy yourself."

Mr. Farnum mustered his strength and rose. He walked shakily past Mr. Meekle, and out the door.

Mr. Meekle quickly neutralized the bubble ingredient, donned his shoes, and remained standing on the floor.

The door burst open, and in came Mr. Farnum with seven bewildered employees following. Mr. Farnum was shouting, "He's floating. I saw it. I saw it."

And then he stopped with mouth agape as he saw Mr. Meekle standing there. The employees were looking from one to the other. One of them said, "Yes, Mr. Farnum, he's floating—I guess—"

"Yes! Yes!" they all chorused. "He's floating all right, all right."

Mr. Farnum found his voice. "But he's not floating now. He's not floating, I said."

At this, the employees chorused, "No! No! Of course not," and, alarmed, ran out of the office and back to their desks.

Mrs. Fenley fell on the way, but somebody picked her up. Mr. Far-

num ran into his employees' office shouting wildly, "Come back! Please come back!"

Everybody, frightened, sat quietly very hard at work.

Mr. Meekle hastily took advantage of the time to get back in the air again.

Mr. Farnum, coming back, saw him, screamed, "He's floating again!" and ran back to his employees' office where he collapsed beside poor Mrs. Fenley's desk, doing her ulcers very little good.

Mr. Meekle floated out without being noticed, for everybody was bending over Mr. Farnum.

Mr. Meekle decided to float home—but he never made it.

As he reached the business section, a policeman noticed him and shouted up, "Hey—we've been looking for you. Come on down."

"What for?" asked Mr. Meekle floating down a bit.

"We've got orders to pick you up on sight," said the officer.

"I didn't do anything. What's the charge?" said Mr. Meekle indignantly.

"The charge—?" The officer drooped visibly—then he brightened up. "Let's get going. The charge is flying without a license."

Mr. Meekle decided to be big about the whole thing. He turned away from the policeman and smeared himself down to earth. They both walked toward the police station.

When they entered the station, the arresting officer said to the ser-

geant, "Here he is—The Floater."

The sergeant eyed Mr. Meekle. Without a word he lifted the phone. Mr. Meekle could hear him making numerous calls. After several of these calls, the sergeant turned to him and said simply, "Wait."

Mr. Meekle waited.

After about one-half hour, the door of the station burst open and in walked a general, two colonels, and what appeared to be a division of the army. The confusion made it seem like a division; actually it was a general, two colonels, three corporals, and four privates.

"We heard he's here," said the general looking around sternly. "I must see him at once!"

"At once!" echoed the two colonels. The three corporals and four privates said nothing.

"Here I am," said Mr. Meekle from one corner, "What is it?"

"You must come with us at once," stated the general.

"And if I don't?" said Mr. Meekle belligerently.

"Please," begged the general, "please come. You simply must. I don't dare return without you. They'll investigate me."

"Please," echoed the two colonels. The three corporals and four privates said nothing.

"Of course I'll go," said Mr. Meekle, deeply touched. His heart went out to the poor general.

Out they marched, and into an official car—Mr. Meekle, the general, and the two colonels. The

three corporals and four privates followed in another car.

Once inside the car, the general told Mr. Meekle that the military chiefs-of-staff had called an emergency meeting, and had flown down from Washington, D. C. They were waiting for him in a hotel room "somewhere downtown." He would say nothing more—it was "a top secret matter."

The story broke in the newspapers the next day. The papers told how Mr. Meekle, a great and loyal citizen, had given his great discovery to his country. This discovery, it was predicted, would revolutionize construction of large aircraft, ships, and heavy weapons. It would even revolutionize military offense tactics and air travel.

The story was also told how Mr. Meekle, the great citizen, offered it to his country for nothing; but the military chiefs-of-staff wouldn't hear of it, since their legal department advised them that this would bring up too many problems. It was legally easier to buy it outright.

Mr. Meekle, though now well-to-do, went back to work for Mr. Farnum. He knew of no feeling as wonderful as working when he didn't have to. He leaned back in his new swivel chair at his large desk—a thoroughly happy man. Mr. Adams had gone down for refreshments, and he could hear him on his way back up the stairs.

Mr. Adams entered the office and placed the box of sodas on an empty desk in front of Mr. Meekle.

Removing the bottle caps, Mr. Adams lined up the sodas on the desk and put the box on the floor.

Mr. Meekle smiled contentedly and reached for his soda.

Suddenly he froze and began to tremble—his lower jaw dropped.

He stared and stared.

Yes! He was sure of it—absolutely sure.

The bubbles in the lime, orange, raspberry, and celery sodas were going straight up!! But the cream soda—!!!

The cream soda bubbles seemed to be going slightly sideways.

SPACE AGE ADDS TO MOTHER'S ROLE

DR. WEERNHER VON BRAUN, speaking on "Woman's Role in a Changing World" at the recent Women's Forum on National Security, in Washington, said, bluntly, that science had "not discovered a substitute for a mother's inspiration."

"My first telescope was a gift from my mother, whose encouragement had more to do with the shaping of my life than any other single factor," said the man chiefly responsible for the successful launching of our satellite. At a time like this when "we hear, see and read of interplanetary voyages, when we look forward to excursions to lunar spas, it might seem a little strange to talk about women's role in the home," he continued. "Yet, if ever there was a period when the affection, inspiration and guidance of a mother could help her child's development, it is the troubled age in which we live."

Parents must resume responsibilities which, in too many instances, has been delegated to the public school—or ignored. With the impact of science and technology requiring a fundamental understanding of mathematics and the physical sciences by all our citizens, the school should be relieved of additional burdens not related to academic preparation. It was to the home, too, "that we must look to instill in young minds a respect for the basic facts of existence—respect for truth, for initiative, for knowledge, for the satisfaction and reward which can only be obtained from the individual's effort," he continued. These were, admittedly, "homely ideals, but they are equally as valid today and tomorrow as they were before the first satellite appeared in our skies."

basic criteria for a moon building

by . . . Dr. John S. Rinehart

What problems must we anticipate as we design a building to be occupied by the first men to reach the Moon?

MAN will, within the foreseeable future, construct permanent buildings on the moon to serve as living quarters for moon explorers, laboratories for astrophysical and astrochemical research, maintenance shops for the vehicles of the space traveler, stations for communication networks and numerous other structures required for many of the common activities of man. How are these buildings to be built? What are the basic design criteria? How do they differ from those applicable to earth-situated buildings? What special facilities must be provided, not needed on earth? What are the environmental differences and hazards? What determines the material we use? What problems must the architect and the construction engineer face? How are the materials to be transported?

Physical characteristics

The moon is a large, essentially spherical body which moves in a slightly elliptical orbit around the earth in accordance with well established physical and astronomical laws: Newton's laws of motion; Newton's Universal Gravitation law; and Kepler's laws. Its mean

Plans were made public recently for a permanent "moon building," to house living quarters, laboratories, etc. The building was designed and engineered by the Wonder Building Corporation of America, in Chicago, under the technical direction of Professor Rinehart, Director of the Mining Research Laboratory, Colorado School of Mines, and former Associate Director, Smithsonian Astrophysical Laboratory, Cambridge, Mass.

distance from the earth is 238,857 miles and it takes 27.3 days to revolve once about the earth. During this revolution it turns exactly once on its own axis so that it always presents the same side to the earth (but the sun illuminates all points on the moon at some time during this revolution). The moon wobbles a bit so that actually we see about 59 percent of its surface.

Its diameter is 2160 miles, approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ that of the earth, but its mass is only $\frac{1}{81}$ that of the earth; thus its density (pounds per cubic foot) is only 0.61 times that of the earth or about 280 pounds per cubic foot. From this we derive, from Newton's Universal Law of Gravitation, a most significant and important result, namely, that the gravitational attraction at the moon's surface is only 0.165 (approximately $\frac{1}{6}$) that on the surface of the earth. Thus on the surface of the moon every object will weigh only $\frac{1}{6}$ as much as on the surface of the earth. The mass or inertia of each object is, however, independent of its location. *In design one must continually keep the distinction between mass and weight clearly in mind.*

Environmental conditions

The environment of a building on the moon differs markedly from its environment on the earth. The moon has no observable atmosphere. There is no haze, no clouds, no winds, no rain or snowstorms. The building is either bathed in intense sunshine or looks upon stark, black,

and cold space. It will be continuously plagued by the great gnat-like rain of interplanetary dust.

The moon has lost its atmosphere, if it ever had any, because of its small size and, hence, low gravitational pull. The velocity of escape from the moon is quite low, 1.5 miles per second, as contrasted with 6.9 miles per second for the earth. (The velocity of escape is the velocity which a body must have in order to fly off into space under its own momentum, never to return.) The gravitational attraction of the earth is strong enough to grip and hold to it the nitrogen and oxygen molecules that form our atmosphere. Not so on the moon. The thermal velocities of the gas molecules are sufficiently high that if gas molecules were ever present, they would long since have wandered off into space. A few molecules of heavy gases such as carbon dioxide, krypton, and xenon may have remained behind or may be seeping out from the moon's interior but these are not significant. *Thus the atmospheric pressure is zero and any building constructed there must be internally pressurized with an atmosphere in which humans can survive.*

The moon's surface, unshielded by an absorbing atmosphere, can feel the full force of the sun's rays and become extremely hot on one side while the other side will quickly have radiated its heat into space and become exceedingly cold. Day and night on the moon are each about two weeks long.

The temperatures on the surface of the moon have been carefully measured using a telescope equipped with a vacuum thermocouple. On one occasion this was done during an eclipse and it was found that the surface of the moon cools very quickly, reaching a low temperature in 20 or 30 minutes after the sun stops shining. The temperature at lunar midday is 214°F ; at sunset, 32°F and at midnight -243°F . *Any structure placed there must be able to withstand these extreme temperatures and especially the tremendous temperature gradients which will abound.*

The ultraviolet radiation, normally absorbed by the earth's atmosphere, will be sufficiently intense to render panes of glass or plastic useless as windows through discoloration. Thus, shutters for such windows must be provided.

The moon is continually bombarded by particulate matter: cosmic rays, charged particles; and meteoric particles. Not much is known about the rate of influx of cosmic rays although recent records from the satellite, Explorer III, indicate that they are considerably more abundant than we have thought. They probably do not present a health hazard but they may be sufficiently abundant to discolor glass or plastic after long exposure.

It is also not possible to define very accurately the nature and distribution of meteoric matter so as to estimate it as a potential hazard to structure. Extraterrestrial material

exists in three forms: the most abundant by far is interplanetary dust, the dust which forms the zodiacal light, a faint band of light seen extending from the sun at the end of twilight; next is the debris from the comets, which, when it streaks through our atmosphere produces an intensely luminous trail, called a meteor; and, lastly, the meteorites, ponderable masses of stone and iron, fragments of planets which once resided between Mars and Jupiter in our solar system. The interplanetary dust ranges in size from 1 to 300 microns in diameter; meteors are fragile, porous bodies of low gross density; and meteorites are solid chunks of iron and stone. The velocity with which any of this material might strike the moon ranges from 1.5 miles per second to about 44 miles per second. There will be no atmosphere to check its velocity as is the case with the earth, where the interplanetary dust and the meteors are rendered impotent. Only the largest of the meteorites, greater than 100 tons, come through our atmosphere and land with velocities undiminished.

How many meteoric bodies are there and how are they distributed in time and space? If one goes out on an average clear night and observes meteors he will see about 10 per hour. This frequency corresponds to about 24 million over the entire sky for a 24-hour period. At certain times during the year (Perseids, 10-12 August; Orionids, 19 October; Leonids, 14 November;

and Gemids, 12 December) the count will be up by a factor of a hundred or more. These so-called showers are periodic but of short duration and contribute only about ten percent of the total number of meteors. Our best picture of a meteor producing particle is that it is a popcorn ball-like mass several centimeters in diameter, weighing a few grams.

The fall of a meteorite is a relatively rare event: about 5 per day reach the earth. Interplanetary dust is by far more abundant in space with the abundance of this dust in the vicinity of the moon being about 5×10^{-21} grams per cubic centimeter. The moon sweeps up this material at the rate of 110 tons per day.

Thus the chance of a large building being struck by a meteorite or a meteor is negligible, one hit in perhaps several thousand years. Interplanetary dust is the real hazard and we do not know how great it is. The particles are small, and even though of great velocity, could be easily warded off with an umbrella-like shield. Our best estimate is that about 3 or 4 particles with diameters ranging from 0.0002 to 0.0004 inches would strike each square yard of exposed surface per day. *A meteoric shield must be a part of any structure built on the moon.*

From a practical viewpoint, the exact nature of the surface of the moon is our greatest unknown. On a grand scale we know that the moon's surface is fraught with large and deep craters, mountain ranges,

and great flat areas. But we cannot look at the moon in the intimate detail needed to provide us with realistic design data for construction. Resolution with our best telescopes is about 1 mile.

Opinion is now divided as to the nature of the moon's landscape. At an Air Force symposium on this subject in April 1958 three eminent astronomers summarized their variant ideas:

No. 1 "The maria (large dark flat areas) are almost certainly covered with lava and will make firm landing spots for earth's spaceships."

No. 2 "The rock has turned slowly to dust by bombardment of rays and particles from the sun and space. The dust, kept stirred up by the same agents that formed it, has flowed like a slow liquid into the moon's low places so the maria are not filled with lava, but with dust perhaps several miles deep. Dust near the surface may be as fluffy as baby powder. Unwary ships might disappear in dry quicksand."

No. 3 "Although the moon may have plenty of dust, its surface has been solidified. There may be a thin layer like dust on a grand piano but underlying material, cemented together (not stirred up) by bombardment from space, is probably 'crunchy' and strong enough to support air alighting spaceships."

With this lack of knowledge and great divergence of opinion we can only design for the worst condition: a sea of dust upon which we must float our structures.

Basic design criteria

Without defining the specific function of the building we know that it must provide for the following:

- (1) Living quarters, including rooms for sleeping, cooking, eating and recreation.
- (2) Physics, chemistry, and biological laboratories.
- (3) A control tower for communication, meteorological studies, earth observations, astronomical observations, traffic control, etc.
- (4) Air conditioning, heating, power and refrigeration plants, oxygen production units, extreme-temperature regulating devices, water supply and sewage disposal plants.
- (5) A machine shop and equipment maintenance area. Further, we know that the structure must be built as an integral floatable unit.

We assume the following: (1) that the location of the building on the moon will be fixed; (2) that the building will be constructed from materials brought from the earth. This restriction implies at once that no single piece can be heavier than the load carrying capacity of the cargo space of our future moon rockets; (3) that the building will provide the functions listed above; and (4) that it will be a permanent type building in the sense that it will be occupied on a continuing basis over several years' time.

A moon building presents its own peculiar problems and first is the matter of gravity. The force of gravity on the moon is approximately $1/6$ that on the earth. This means that the deflection of a cantilever beam or any other load supporting beam or column will be only $1/6$ as great as it would be on earth. Changes in gravity will not effect the strength properties of the materials. For design purposes we can, in all static situations, (N.B. only static, not dynamic) replace the "g" of 32 feet per second which repeatedly appears in our strength of materials formulas by one sixth its value, say 5 feet per second. A whole new field of design is opened up. It is as if we had an exceedingly high-strength, lightweight construction material.

We must, however, be wary of any dynamic situation. We do not change the mass of our material by transporting it to the moon. It would be just as difficult to accelerate a car on the moon as it is on the earth. Thus, designs involving vibratory or rotary motion must conform to the normal earth pattern. An electric generator designed for moon use would not appear substantially different from an earthly one.

Reduction in gravity will influence the convective flow of air and the rate of flow of liquids downhill. These changes are likely to become important in design of the heating, power, water, sewage, and ventilating system.

Ramps and stairs can be much

steeper because man will be able to lift himself with $1/6$ the effort required on earth. A crane designed for a one ton load on the earth can lift at least six tons on the moon. We must, on the other hand, be careful with our elevators for here we are *accelerating* and *decelerating* masses.

No consideration need be given wind or snow loads since they will not exist. Our major stresses now come from the artificial atmosphere contained within the hermetically sealed building. Normal atmospheric pressure, 14.7 pounds per square inch, is a realistic figure to use for design purposes; 10 pounds per square inch would be sufficient. The problem is not unlike that encountered by the designers of high flying aircraft except perhaps in one respect which could be significant. On the moon we can play the gravitational forces against the air pressure forces, achieving some kind of equilibrium which may gain us an advantage. This is a matter that needs looking into. Broad expanses of curved structures can be used but we must tie the whole together with rods or similar means so that it does not suffer an internal explosion.

Rapid, intense heating and sudden, severe cooling present difficult, but certainly solvable, design problems. The parts of the structure becoming shaded will immediately become exceedingly cold, while those in the sun will remain heated to a high temperature. During the lunar day, when the sun is upon the struc-

ture, devices must be provided to regulate the influx and efflux of heat. These should be tied together to the heating and ventilating systems. But we must also be prepared to be without our principal energy source, the sun, for two weeks at a time. This means providing energy storage facilities of no mean proportion.

The potential hazard from cosmic rays, while still one of the big unknowns, is probably not great enough to warrant modifying constructional practices. Eventually the living quarters may be lined with thin sheets of lead.

The bombardment by meteoric matter is serious but can be dealt with. The best approach is to use the scheme long in use by tent dwellers to protect themselves from the fury of rainstorms; a canvas canopy covering, placed above and separated some distance from the roof of the tent, which dulls the force of the impact of the raindrops and diverts the material away from the roof of the tent. On the moon, the canopy must be of metal, not canvas, whose thickness will be sufficient to stop meteoritic dust. A $1/32$ inch thick aluminum shield should be sufficient.

Finally, we are concerned with foundations for the building and here is the greatest difficulty. There seems to be but little else to do but to design the building as a structure which floats in a stationary ocean of dust, anchored in place by large, heavy blocks suspended by long

cables from the body of the structure. In many ways its construction will resemble that of a ship at anchor, a freely-floating, self-contained unit. The building need not be streamlined. Fortunately, also, it need not be built to withstand the tumultuous forces exerted by a watery ocean. The dust on the moon is as calm as a mill pond.

According to Archimedes' principle a body immersed in a fluid is water buoyed up by a force equal to the weight of the fluid it displaces. A 10,000 ton ship, for example, has 320,000 cubic feet (1 cubic foot weighs 62.4 pounds) immersed when it is floating. Now, how will our dust ocean act in this respect? We are safe in concluding that it will act as a fluid of low density: for design purposes, about 0.5 times the density of water or 30 pounds per cubic foot. Thus the lower part of our building will be covered with dust, the volume, V , so covered being given by

$$V \text{ (ft}^3\text{)} = \frac{\text{Total weight of building (pounds)}}{30}$$

The dust will tend to support the lower floor, or hull. At a 60 foot depth, the pressure acting on the floor will be just equal to atmospheric pressure. If the hull is embedded to depths greater than this it must be designed so as not to be crushed by the weight of the dust.

Since the building is floating, weight must be fairly uniformly distributed if it is not to topple over or settle in unevenly.

If the moon's surface proves to be sufficiently solid it will provide normal support for the building and may be used as foundation blocks.

The design

There is no one building uniquely qualified for placement on the moon. Design requirements allow as well as demand a diversity of structural types, proportions, materials and forms. The Buck Rogers portable and inflatable plastic balloon house is a perfectly practical type of temporary housing.

Permanent housing must be fabricated from more durable materials. Aluminum suggests itself immediately because of its high strength, low weight, and ease of fabrication. Aluminum also provides a good reflecting surface which aids in cooling problems.

The basic elements of the Wonder Building Corporation of America's "Truss-Skin" roof system are well suited for construction of moon buildings because of its great flexibility and versatility. Some details have necessarily been modified, including the development of means for hermetically sealing the structures.

The basic scientific information needed to complete first designs of functional and attractive buildings for use on the moon are at hand. Our task has been the very specific one of taking these scientific guide lines and producing a practical model.

traveling salesman

by . . . Lloyd Biggle

The Feds were getting tough.
It was costing too much to
distribute the stuff. He'd
probably have to go away...

THE day was Sunday, the time was 5:19 P.M., Eastern Standard Time. Charles Armstrong threw a switch, and stepped through into Time Dimension 7. He experienced nothing but a momentary breathlessness and a slight jolt. The breathlessness he was accustomed to; the jolt irritated him. He moved to his Time Dimension 7 workbench and scribbled on a memo pad, "Raise machine 1/16 inch." Then he hurried up a stairway.

With the aid of a complicated arrangement of peep holes he checked his surroundings carefully before he slid aside a panel and stepped through the wall into a spacious living room. He moved quickly from window to window, looking out at the calm country landscape. A flock of sheep were grazing contentedly just beyond his fence, confident that Armstrong's dogs couldn't get at them. A savage, half-breed dog lay near the fence, watching them hungrily. Far down the hill he could see lights in Farmer Winslow's barn. The farmer would be milking his goats. From the opposite window he looked down on a small, picturesque lake where ducks floated lazily.

Armstrong took out four cartons

We still know next to nothing about Lloyd Biggle, except that he has a wry humor and an ability which makes him one of the more interesting of the new writers. He will be remembered for his JUDGEMENT DAY (F.U., April 1958) about the man who'd never told anyone about the pictures he saw.

of dog meat, and went out to feed his dogs. There were four of them, and he had the enclosed space around the cottage fenced into four sections, so the dogs couldn't tear each other apart sometime when he was late in feeding them.

While they gulped their food noisily, he took a rake and carefully circled the dirt path outside his ten-foot fence, smoothing it behind him. He found nothing but a few sheep tracks. Satisfied, he returned to the cottage and dressed himself meticulously.

Impatient to get started, he paced back and forth briefly and finally sat down at his desk, took a copy of H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* from a secret compartment and read a few pages into his voicewriter. The machine clicked busily, sliding the finished pages into a pile in front of him. He hesitated several times, looked critically at the voicewritten pages, and read on. When the pile seemed thick enough, he swept the pages into a drawer, concealed the book, and hurried out to his aircar.

The farmer's wife was crossing the yard as he flew over. She waved at him, and he blinked his landing lights in reply. He flew cross-country for ten minutes, turned into the crowded New York air lane, and half an hour later set his aircar down on the Times Square landing platform.

He went immediately to a public visiphone, and he self-consciously straightened his tie and tossed his cape back over one shoulder with

studied carelessness before he dialed. The screen in front of him shimmered hazily, and abruptly focused.

A girl, blonde, voluptuous and long-limbed, dressed in a semi-transparent lounging robe and very little else, looked out at him expectantly, and squealed with delight.

"Charles, darling, where *have* you been? I've been trying to find you, and nobody knows where that queer country place of yours is."

"Been working," Armstrong said. "Got a couple more chapters done. See you tonight?"

"Sorry, darling. Just impossible—I have too much to do. That's why I wanted to talk to you. I wanted to invite you to my wedding. I'm getting married tomorrow. Now don't carry on so, you darling brute. You look as if you're going to run out and take poison. My getting married doesn't have anything to do with us. I've told you over and over again that I couldn't marry *you*. The old man wouldn't stand for it."

"I know," Armstrong said. "But I'd hoped . . ."

"Just be reasonable, darling. The old man would disinherit me, and why should I throw away all that money? And Wilber—Wilber Fornis, that's who I'm marrying—he's loaded, too, you know. A girl has to put up with a few inconveniences to be rich. You know yourself it takes years and years for a writer to make any money, and you'll never get rich as long as you write those queer stories. Now don't let it bother you—there's a good boy. Give me a

call in about a month, and we'll arrange a nice weekend together. I'll cheer you up!"

"I don't know," Armstrong said slowly. "Anyway—I wish you all kinds of happiness."

She stared at him. "Now that's a hell of a thing to say to someone who's getting married. What's the matter with you, anyway?"

Armstrong half-promised to call her in a month, and cut off. He kicked the wall of the visiphone booth savagely. "What a damnable beginning! This trip will probably be another flop." He studied his appearance in the mirror, straightened his tie again, and dialed another number.

This girl was a brunette, demure and not especially attractive. She stared at him, clapped her hand to her mouth, and glanced behind her cautiously. "Charles! You weren't supposed to call me again!"

Armstrong's pent-up irritation exploded. "I can't help it, damn it! Do you love me, or don't you?"

She faltered. "Yes. I—I love you. But dad forbade me to see you again. He said you're just a fortune hunter. He says he'll change his will if I marry you. He'll even change it if I don't stop seeing you."

Armstrong grinned, confident again. Fathers always came around, eventually. All it took was a grandchild. "Let him change it," he said. "We don't need his money. I don't even want it. We can get along if we love each other, can't we?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose we could. But

I'd hate to make Dad and Moms unhappy. It's not just your being a writer, but if only you'd write something *respectable*."

"I will," Armstrong said fervently. "I'll forget all about the science fiction. What do you want me to write?"

"No." She shook her head sadly. "No. You must be true to yourself. I know you'll be a great writer, some day, and I'll always be proud that I've known you. But please don't call me again."

Abruptly, the screen went blank. Armstrong swore violently, and slammed the door after him as he left the booth. He'd botched things up nicely.

He walked down West Forty-second Street to a small, crumbly hotel, mounted to the second floor, and knocked on the door. Two knocks, a pause, then three knocks. The door opened a crack, Armstrong was cautiously scrutinized and admitted, and the door was quickly closed behind him. A wizened scarecrow of a man peered at Armstrong through thick glasses. "Got any?"

Armstrong took a bottle of aspirin tablets from his pocket, and placed it on the table. Trembling fingers seized the bottle, dumped the contents onto a dirty piece of paper, and counted deftly. "Hundred—got any more?"

Armstrong produced another bottle. It was dumped, and the contents quickly counted. The man took one tablet from each bottle, and tasted

carefully. "Good stuff. Got any more?"

"Not this trip."

He nodded, took a thick roll of bills from his pocket, and reluctantly counted the money into Armstrong's hand. One thousand, two thousand credits.

Armstrong scowled. "Price gone down?"

"Has to. Feds are really getting tough. Costs a hell of a lot to distribute the stuff. Might lose money on this batch. I'm getting out of New York, in a couple of days, until things quiet down."

"I'm thinking of switching to Philadelphia," Armstrong said. "Got any connections there?"

"Yeah—Philly. Might go to Philly myself. When'll you have some more stuff?"

"Hard to say."

"There's a little frozen foods store way out on Market Street. Marty's Frozen Foods. When you get some stuff, you ask Marty how to get hold of Chip. I'll leave word."

"Will do," Armstrong said.

He hurried out of the hotel and walked back towards Times Square, glancing furtively over his shoulder to see if he was being followed. He entered a restaurant, found an empty booth, and dialed his order. He leaned back thoughtfully while he waited.

It was a hell of a mess, he thought. No matter how hard he worked, nothing seemed to work out. He hadn't had any success for a year and a half—anywhere—and now there

wasn't one grade A businessman left in the entire New York area that he could consider a prospective father-in-law. He'd either have to shift his base of operations, or pull out.

But he didn't want to pull out. He liked Time Dimension 7. It was as good a place to live as any Time Dimension he'd found. He'd have to start over again in Philadelphia. He could still be a writer, but he wouldn't write science fiction. That had been a serious mistake, but of course, he hadn't known that when he started out. He'd thought a Time Dimension as scientifically advanced as No. 7 would be enthused about science fiction. But they seemed to like old-fashioned stuff. Dickens—he wondered if they would like Dickens. He'd have to edit the stuff, which would be a lot of work, but with a voicewriter it should be possible. He could do a little study, and make himself a writer of historical novels. Hell—Dickens was supposed to be a good writer. His stuff *should* be successful. The next time he got back to Time Dimension 1 he'd pick up the complete works of Dickens.

He finished his meal and walked back to the parking platform, where he entered a visiphone booth and placed a mail subscription for three months of Philadelphia newspapers. The society pages would be a good place to start looking for eligible heiresses, and when he got a list made up he could start checking on their fathers.

He flew back to his cottage with-

out incident. It was 22:30 Eastern Standard Time in Time Dimension 7, and the farmhouse was dark. Armstrong climbed into his Time Dimension 7 bed, and had himself gently rocked asleep.

The bed awakened him at seven, by rocking gently, then firmly, and finally dumping him onto the floor when he failed to respond. He placed a frozen breakfast unit on the stove to heat while he was dressing. After eating, he stepped through the wall panel to the concealed stairway, and descended to his basement workroom. For the next hour he methodically visited each of the eleven Time Dimensions in which he had a base established, fed his dogs, and carefully inspected the ground outside each fence for signs of intruders.

His last stop was Time Dimension 3. There, in one end of his cottage living room, he had a machine shop, with a stationary steam engine furnishing power from a shed outside. On his work bench was a small gasoline engine, the product of Time Dimension 1. Armstrong had disassembled it, made a scale drawing of each part, carefully removed all identifying marks of the manufacturer, and reassembled it. He could have built one himself, but it seemed a waste of time when he could acquire one ready made.

He changed into a costume suitable for Time Dimension 3, and busied himself with building a crate for the gasoline engine. It was nearly ten o'clock when he finished. He

strolled down the hill to the farmhouse, and found Farmer Hilton waiting for him with a horse and buggy.

The farmer grinned happily as his rough hand crushed Armstrong's.

"Saw ya comin', so I hitched her up," he said.

"Well, now, that was nice of you. Anything I can bring you from town?"

"Oh, no—you been too good to us, Mr. Armstrong. Glad to help out."

Armstrong nodded his thanks, and drove the buggy back up to the cottage. He loaded in the gasoline engine, and carefully padlocked the gate after him as he drove away. The padlock he had made himself—copying the best lock he could buy in Time Dimension 1.

Armstrong drove into Princeton on tortuously muddy roads, left his horse and buggy at a livery stable, and caught the train to Newark, taking the gasoline engine into the coach with him as hand baggage. At Newark, he hired a horse and buggy, loaded in his gasoline engine, and drove out into the country to the estate of his Time Dimension 3 father-in-law.

He drove up the broad, horseshoe-shaped drive to the sprawling house, and his wife Victoria burst joyously from the veranda and threw herself into his arms. "Was the train late, darling? I'm so glad you didn't get lost in your work and forget to come. Daddy has some kind of important meeting for you tonight, and

it would have disappointed him terribly. Charlie, Charlie, see who's here!"

Charles Armstrong, Jr., toddled down the steps, his two-year-old face puckered into an impish grin. He gave his father a rough but respectful hug, searching in his pockets for candy, found some, and munched cheerfully. Time Dimension 3 candy. In a moment of carelessness Armstrong had once brought home some delicacies from Time Dimension 1, and caused a sensation. For months afterwards the entire household had been after him to buy more. But it was, he explained, something that had to be imported, and he hadn't been able to find any.

Armstrong arranged with a stable boy to return his rented horse and buggy, and tenderly carried the gasoline engine up onto the veranda. Victoria looked at it wide-eyed. "You've finished it? Oh, Charles!"

His mother-in-law regarded it sedately. She was no more than forty-five, but she was the sedate kind of woman, and Time Dimension 3 was a sedate civilization. "Roger will be pleased," she said. "It's hard to convince men they should invest money in something they haven't seen. But if it works—it does work, doesn't it?"

"Mother!" Victoria exclaimed. "Of course, it works. Didn't my husband build it?"

Mrs. Cahill smiled faintly, and returned to her knitting.

"We'll have a demonstration when Dad gets home," Armstrong

said. "You'll find that it's an infernally noisy thing, but it works very well."

"Do you have to go back tomorrow?" Victoria asked anxiously.

"I'm afraid so. Still have lots of work to do on this."

"I'd hoped we could take a lunch and have a picnic—just the three of us."

"Too muddy," Mrs. Cahill said firmly. "Not good for Victoria, anyway."

"Oh, Mother!"

"Don't tell me you haven't told him."

"But, Mother . . ."

"A husband's got a right to know. A *duty* to know. After all . . ."

Armstrong stared at Victoria's blushing face. "What's all this? You don't mean to say—that's wonderful!"

"I'm so happy, Charles," she whispered. "And Charlie needs a little brother or sister. Are you happy? Oh, Charles!"

She flung herself into his arms, and Mrs. Cahill dryly collected her knitting and left.

That evening the family and a half-dozen businessmen that Cahill had invited in sat in a circle watching Armstrong's gasoline engine pound away noisily. Mrs. Cahill and Victoria held their hands over their ears and grimaced painfully. Charles, Junior, watched open-mouthed, and the eyes of the businessmen were glistening dollar signs.

Later, they retired to the house, and the men gathered in Roger Ca-

hill's study for what Armstrong regarded as a painful two hours of business chatter. The men left, eventually, and Cahill pressed another cigar on Armstrong, had a new supply of drinks brought in, and leaned back contentedly.

"I don't doubt," he said, "that this engine will be everything you say it will. And it will make a fortune for both of us. We'll own fifty-two per cent of the stock between us, and you'll be getting a nice royalty on every engine the company makes. Then there'll be those other ideas of yours—that lock, for one thing. That should cause a sensation. I give you just five years to make your first million. The second million will come quicker, of course."

"I'm afraid I'm not very practical in business matters," Armstrong said. "Without you to back me, I probably couldn't have brought this off."

"Nonsense. You'd have made out all right."

"Just the same, I'm glad to have someone I can trust to manage things for me. You look after the business end of it, and let me do the inventing. I'm sure it'll work out best that way."

Cahill nodded. He did not look dissatisfied. "I'm rather happy the way things have worked out," he said. "I don't mind saying I had my doubts about you, at first. Thought you were one of these blasted fortune hunters, and I was certain your marriage to Vicky wouldn't last a year. But you've made her as happy

as any girl could be. She'd like to have you around more, of course, but I know how much sweat goes into something like this, and I'm sure she understands."

"I hope this goes all right," Armstrong said. "After all that work on the electric light . . ."

"Don't let that worry you. They're interested, all right. I'll have the money in the morning. And when we're big enough, we can get to work on that electric light again. We've got the patents, so there's nothing to worry about. There wasn't anything wrong with the idea. It just took more capital than I could swing."

Armstrong nodded. The electric light was his first Time Dimension 3 invention, but he ran into stubborn resistance. After all, what was wrong with gas? Why spend all that money for a powerplant and transmission lines when people were happy the way things were? And wasn't electricity dangerous? Even his father-in-law had been skeptical. But the gasoline engine seemed to be going over. Now he was toying with the idea of inventing the telegraph. Perhaps he could get the government interested in financing a trial installation.

Victoria was waiting for Armstrong in their bedroom. "You're getting too important," she said. "Now I can't even have you when you get home."

It was early the next afternoon when Armstrong drove his buggy up to the Hilton Farm. The Hiltons'

ten-year-old son took charge of the horse, and also the package of presents Armstrong had bought for the family in Newark. Armstrong felt a warm affection for the Hiltons. He wished he could do something for them. Something big. Whenever he saw sturdy, red-faced, kindly Mrs. Hilton laboring in the barn his conscience bothered him. He wanted to give them a milking machine, but there were just too many complications. He would have to go slow—he'd learned that much. It wouldn't do to spring something that involved half a dozen complicated inventions.

But once he got the gasoline engine on the market, perhaps he could manage it. He could develop a milking machine powered by the gasoline engine. He could, that is, if some essential material wasn't lacking in the Time Dimension 3 economy. He'd have to check on that.

He looked his cottage over carefully, fed his dogs, and then visited the other ten Time Dimensions. He fed his dogs, inspected the automatic feeders he'd set up for the times when he might have to be absent a few days, checked for prowlers, and allowed himself to be seen by the farmer in each Time Dimension. In Time Dimension 7 he walked down to the farmhouse and picked up his mail—the accumulations of newspapers from Philadelphia.

Satisfied that everything was in order, he stepped through into Time Dimension 19. His cottage was a glistening, pre-fabricated structure of an aluminum alloy, and there was

a sleek, atomic-powered automobile in his garage. Armstrong drove to Princeton on a broad, smoothly surfaced highway. He stopped to make two phone calls, and drove on to New York.

His first stop was the office of a stout industrialist. That worthy gentleman pawed eagerly at the small bag of cheap industrial diamonds that Armstrong gave him. He spread them out on his desk, beamed happily at them, weighed them carefully, and counted out an impressive pile of cash for Armstrong.

Armstrong could buy industrial diamonds for next to nothing in Time Dimension 3, where industry was still in its infancy. And a few of these same diamonds brought a gratifying price in highly industrialized Time Dimension 19, where the demand was incessant—and where the diamonds of Central and South Africa had never been discovered.

Armstrong's second stop was the home of a charming young debutante. Armstrong took her to dinner, made bright conversation with her, and very correctly and properly took her home. Society in Time Dimension 19 was organized along very correct and proper lines. Armstrong had been engaged to a lovely young heiress, and two weeks before their wedding date she had gotten herself tragically killed in an automobile accident. It was another in Armstrong's long series of frustrations.

But he had to conduct himself correctly and properly about the whole thing. He had retired for a suitable

period of mourning, and now he was gradually easing himself back into circulation. There were enough heiresses among the friends of his former fiancée to provide a wide field of selection. The only question was, which father would make the most desirable father-in-law? Armstrong was uncertain, but he was studying the problem carefully. When he made up his mind, he would pick a suitable profession to match his father-in-law's talent. In the meantime, he was doing very well with the diamonds.

Armstrong checked into a hotel for the night, and in the morning he drove back to his cottage, made his usual inspection tour, and stepped through into Time Dimension 5. He flew his helicopter in to Princeton, made a half-dozen telephone calls, found a half-dozen young ladies unavailable, unenthused, or under paternal edict, and flew angrily back to his cottage. He couldn't see any break at all in the bad luck that had plagued him for a year and a half.

In Time Dimension 12 he sat down in front of a typewriter, and worked busily at copying Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. He thought Hemingway would make a highly successful writer in Time Dimension 12. The problem was in editing the background of a story. He couldn't use *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, because a war about the Spanish Revolution wouldn't make much sense in a Time Dimension where there hadn't been any Spanish Revo-

lution. And *A Farewell to Arms* set in World War I Italy created some problems in a Time Dimension where Italy had not participated in World War I. Both novels could be adapted to other settings, but that would take work, so he was starting out with *The Old Man and the Sea*.

He worked industriously for three hours. Then he collected the pages he had typed, got out his automobile, and drove to New York. It was a normal automobile, much like those of Time Dimension 1, but less streamlined, and with less chrome, fewer gadgets, and much, much better performance. The engineers of Time Dimension 12 were more concerned about what a car did than how it looked. In most respects, though, Time Dimension 12 was startlingly similar to Time Dimension 1. It was the most normal world that Armstrong had discovered.

It was evening when Armstrong reached the Long Island home of his wife's parents. His wife, a chubby but not unattractive blonde girl, greeted him affectionately, and hauled him off to the nursery to view the latest antics of Charles Armstrong, Jr. The plump six-month-old baby gurgled and cooed and displayed exhibitionistic tendencies to delight the proudest parents.

It wasn't until later, when she had Armstrong settled comfortably on a sofa and herself settled comfortably on his lap, that she asked him how the book was coming.

"Wonderful," Armstrong said. "I'm really breezing along. I should

have it finished in a couple of weeks."

"Dad will be happy to hear that."

"He will?" Armstrong said doubtfully.

"He will now. He took what you have finished over to a professor friend of his, and the professor says you're an out and out genius. Entirely new style, and all that. It'll revolutionize modern American letters. Dad is so pleased to have a genius in the family that he's going to publish it no matter what his editors say."

"I really don't think he should," Armstrong said seriously. "I can always find my own publisher, and if his firm isn't sold on the book . . ."

"Don't be silly. What's the point in having a publisher for a father-in-law if you don't let him publish your book?"

"I'll have to talk to him about it," Armstrong said.

"He'll convince you. He's all enthused, now. And he's the boss, so it really doesn't matter what his editors say. He'd be tickled pink to have it become a best seller after they told him not to publish it."

"I hardly think . . ."

She interrupted him with a kiss. "Oh, don't be so modest. How about flying down to Florida for a couple of days?"

Armstrong hesitated. He hated to waste time. But then—this trip was building up to another total loss, and some relaxation might be good for him. "Sure," he said. "A little time away from the book might be healthy for me. When do we leave?"

Armstrong was back at his cottage Tuesday morning. He made his usual round of inspection, and stopped off for a brief check on Time Dimension 10. World War II wasn't over yet, in Time Dimension 10, though the end was expected almost any day. Armstrong was keeping discreetly out of sight. He didn't want to get into difficulties as a draft dodger, and he felt that he'd done his share of fighting World War II in Time Dimension 1.

During the afternoon he was in to Princeton four times and back again, in Time Dimensions 5, 9, 11 and 16, and he scored no progress. Worse than no progress. He had the definite feeling that he was losing ground. Some of the damned fathers of girls on his lists infuriated him. They thought he was after their money, and a father-in-law's money was the last thing Armstrong yearned for. What he wanted, what he had to have, was a good business manager in every Time Dimension. A father-in-law made an ideal business manager, if he was a good business man. He could be trusted. He could do all right for himself, too.

But these thundering idiots called him a fortune hunter, and accused him of wanting to marry their daughters for their money.

By the time he reached Time Dimension 14, Armstrong was in a seething, sputtering rage. He stomped about the room, smashing test tubes on the floor. "Get it over with," he told himself. "Wind this up in a hurry, and go home. Next

trip you can make a clean start. You've wasted enough time. No results for a year and a half . . ."

He stalked down to the farmhouse, and got his horse and buggy.

Time Dimension 14 was a horse-and-buggy civilization, but the automobile was coming into use, electric lights, the telegraph and the telephone had already been invented, and with the most obvious inventions already spoken for, Armstrong had gone into another field. His decision had been influenced by the fact that he had a prosperous drug manufacturer as a prospective father-in-law—but that wasn't working out, either. When the situation had looked more hopeful, Armstrong had set himself up as a scientist, and given himself a thorough course in general research chemistry and bacteriology.

Evening found Armstrong calling at a sprawling monstrosity of a house in Trenton. The girl was very glad to see him, and very frightened about his being there. Armstrong, in his eagerness to wind things up, used a brusque frontal attack that terrified her.

"Do you love me, or don't you?" he snapped.

"Charles! You know . . ."

"I know nothing of the kind. I don't care what your father thinks of me. I'm not marrying *him*. You're of age, and you're old enough to make up your own mind. Either we get married tomorrow, or you'll never see me again. Which will it be?"

She stood before him and sobbed convulsively. She was a small girl,

plain-looking, with an overly-large nose that completely spoiled her face. But he suspected that underneath the layers of clothing that females wore in this Time Dimension she might have an enticingly arranged figure.

He watched her coldly until she lifted her tear-stained face, and whispered, "I'll marry you."

Electrified, he seized her in his arms and danced about the room.

"Father," she whispered. "What will I tell Father?"

"Let me talk to your father," Armstrong said confidently.

Ebenezer White did not greet Armstrong joyfully. He was a robust, middle-aged man with prematurely white hair, and the sight of Armstrong fired his naturally pink complexion into a flaming red. "I've told you, sir," he thundered, "that you are not welcome in my house."

"Your daughter and I are getting married tomorrow," Armstrong said coolly. "If possible, with your blessings. If necessary, without."

White sputtered impotently, and his red face took on a definite tinge of purple. "I see. I suppose there's nothing I can do about *that*. But I'll have you know, you scamp, that you'll never lay a hand on my money or business."

"If that's all that's bothering you," Armstrong said, "why don't you call in a lawyer now, and make the necessary arrangements? I have enough money for us to live on comfortably, and every expectation of

future success. But frankly, I think it would be best for Janis to live here with you. I spend a lot of time at my laboratory, and she wouldn't like being alone. For her sake, I think we should be able to work out some reasonable arrangement."

There was skepticism in White's wry smile. "Do you actually mean you have no objection to my putting my estate in trust for Janis? You wouldn't be able to touch it, you know, and the executor would keep a careful watch on what she did with her money."

"Sounds like a sensible arrangement," Armstrong said. "I'm certainly no businessman—I'm a scientist. I couldn't blame you in the least for wanting your estate in capable hands."

White stared at Armstrong. "I don't quite understand this. My daughter is no raving beauty. Frankly, I consider her homely. And you're a handsome man. Why would you want to marry my daughter, if not for her money?"

"Perhaps Janis told you, sir, that I've been married before. I married my first wife because she was beautiful. It's a rare woman who can be beautiful and stay that way. I vowed that if I ever married again, I'd look for other qualities than beauty."

"I see," White said. He fumbled in a drawer, found a lavishly polished corn-cob pipe, and got it lit. "Your—ah—work. Have you found that cure for smallpox yet?" He chuckled.

"Not a cure, sir. A *prevention*. Yes, I believe I've found it."

White dropped his pipe, and stared. "You have?"

"Yes, sir. All I need is the right firm to produce and sell it."

White's face was almost back to its normal pink. His eyes narrowed. "Seems to me there'd be quite a market for something like that. Every man, woman and child in America would be a potential customer."

"Every man, woman and child in the world, sir."

"In the world," White repeated. "Every man, woman and child in the world." His eyes gleamed brightly. "I'd like to talk to you about that—after the honeymoon, of course."

"After the honeymoon," Armstrong agreed. They shook hands.

Nine days later Armstrong drove up in front of his Time Dimension 1 apartment house, and began unloading packages from his car. From an upstairs window Mrs. Hallihan looked down, nudged Mrs. Jones, who was a new tenant, and said, "There he is—that's Armstrong. He's late this trip. Handsome brute, isn't he? I always said a woman's a fool to marry a good-looking man like that, and let him be a traveling salesman. We used to say he dealt exclusively in lingerie, and we didn't mean selling it, either. Once when he was supposed to be out on the road I saw him myself, coming out of that big apartment building down the street, with a woman that lived there.

There was a woman right here in this building, too—and him with six children, and his wife used to be such a pretty thing. Never could figure out why he wanted to be a salesman. Not the type, you know. We always said he couldn't sell hot soup to the Eskimos. What he really ought to be is a mechanic, or something like that. He can fix anything, TV sets, and radios, and cars—real handy with his hands. You should see some of the things he's built. But he had to be a traveling salesman—wanted to get out so he could chase women, I suppose. His family had a terrible time, and he lost one job after another because he wouldn't work, and they were always about to be evicted. But the last three years or so he's settled down and tended to business. He's been making plenty of money, and they moved down to a first-floor apartment and got all new furniture, and you should see the new television set they bought last month. I couldn't say—maybe he just got too old for it. Men get that way, you know, though he certainly doesn't *look* it . . ."

Armstrong looked up, and saw the faces in the upstairs window. That nose-y Mrs. Hallihan, and the other would be the new tenant who was just moving in when he left. Bah! He really should get out of this dumpy apartment, and buy a house somewhere. But it wouldn't do to get prosperous *too* quickly.

The Armstrong family poured out of the front door. The five girls jumped up and down excitedly on the porch, and five-year-old Charles, Junior, tore down the steps and hurled himself at his father.

"Bring me something this time, Daddy?"

"Sure," Armstrong said. "Lots of presents for everyone."

Mrs. Armstrong greeted her husband with a motherly kiss on the cheek.

"Sorry, I'm late," Armstrong said. "Had to make a side trip to Chicago."

"Quite all right, darling. Have a nice trip? How was business?"

"Not bad, my dear," Armstrong said, beaming. "Not bad at all. I landed a new account."

NEXT ISSUE—

H. Beam Piper's *THE OTHER ROAD*

Miriam Allen DeFord's *PRISON BREAK*

Louis Golding's *THE SWITCH AT THE DOOR*

Bertram Chandler's *TO HELL FOR A PASTIME*

Ivan T. Sanderson's *WHAT COULD THEY BE?*

David C. Knight's *BEANPEAS IN THE AFTERNOON*

—in *FANTASTIC UNIVERSE*

miss
millie's
rose

by . . . Joy Leache

The customs man announced he had an old dame there "with one of them Jap trees." How was he to know what'd happen?

GENERALLY speaking, we do not go in for publicity, but everyone is conscious of the trouble-shooting section of Inter-Galactic Customs just now. It was all over the news panels when we let that Corianna ceramic pass inspection at Marsport, and it burnt down four square blocks.

We try to hush up our mistakes, but we never apologize for them. We know that nobody can figure every possibility every time. No man or machine can calculate the probability of disaster when a commodity is taken from one environment to another. We do the best we can, that's all.

Sometimes we slip, as we did on the ceramic, and sometimes we don't, as when the team at Venusport turned back that ancient art exhibit before the blue pigments changed to bright yellow. Venusian atmosphere does that to cobalt when it is suspended in certain oils.

Sometimes it ends in a draw, as in the case of Miss Millie's rose.

Miss Millie and her rose arrived on the Tuesday flight from Northwestern Terraport. It was only by the merest fluke that we ever saw

Joy Leache reports that she is twenty-four years old, and that she has been trying to write since she was ten. "The only outstanding characteristic I have is keeping two dogs and three cats," she writes. She also, as you'll discover, tells a very different story about Tomorrow's Mars.

the rose at all. Umpty-zillion types of roses have been planted in the gardens of Mars, with no ill effects other than the gnashed teeth of Terran rose fanciers. Roses do better here than on their native planet.

The fluke was that George Haskins, our most inefficient checker, had smashed his glasses while taking a shower on Monday. If he had seen it, he would have known it was a rose, and let it pass through.

"Carrie," he said, into the intercom mike.

"Yes, George," I said.

"I got a ole dame here wit one of them Jap trees," he said in his most charming customs-shed manner.

I should have made him call Records and see if the ole dame's particular variety of Jap tree showed up on the lists of imports, but Sam and I had been doing Professor Phillips' beetles for two days, and I needed variety.

"Send her up, George."

"Wit da tree?"

"Yes, George," I said, and clicked off my mike. "That George should have been a video star," I told Sam. "Such wit, such grace of manner, such beauty."

Sam is the conscientious type. He went on trying to match a beetle to one of half a million colored photographs. "Beauty?" he said.

"The way that lock of hair, lōnely as it is, contrives to fall into his face is devastating," I said. "He's sending up 'a ole dame.' Put down

your beetle, and put away the beetle book."

Sam shook his head at me. "You handle it alone," he said. "I want to finish this before I die."

"The museum said there was no hurry," I reminded him.

"That was three months ago," Sam said. "One of these days, Smeltzer will get a letter asking where they are. He'll come down here and find them in two Calofiz containers and a cookie jar. We'll be fired again."

"All right," I said. "Ruin your eyes on the beetles. I'll be happy to examine the tree."

"It ought to be here by now," said Sam, "unless it exploded in the grav shaft."

"I'll go out and have a look," I said, leaping from my chair.

"I admire your frankness," Sam said, squinting at the pincers of a purple beetle. "When you're bored, you let everyone know about it."

"I'm the soul of honesty," I said as I closed the door.

Halfway down the hall was a little old woman, walking from door to door, bending down to read the lettering on each one. She held a blue china dish in front of her, supporting it carefully with both hands. There was a purse under one arm and the strings of a flight case wrapped around the other. She was an exceedingly strange exhibit for Mars, which is a young people's planet. Most people live here for their working lives, and go to Terra or Luna when they retire. The old

woman with the miniature tree was ninety at least, and that was presuming a life of hard work.

She had Terra written all over her. She was wearing a black coat with a fur collar, which was highly impractical, since Terran furs become bald in a few weeks on Mars. Under the coat she was wearing a dress. Dresses are only worn for formal occasions on Mars, and indoor formal occasions at that. There is always a wind blowing on Mars, not strong, but terribly persistent. We wear pants. And hoods. She had on a hat of black pseudostraw with a black feather on it.

Smeltzer does not like for the employees to go around shouting in the halls, since the Customs building is constructed of unadorned aerogranite, which sets up an echo unequalled in volume. So I set off toward the old woman, sounding like a regiment of cavalry coming down a paved highway. She didn't look up until I was almost on her, and the cavalry had been joined by a few light field pieces.

"Were you looking for the Special Examination Office?" I asked.

She stared at me over her glasses. "Speak up, young woman," she said coldly. "Open your mouth. Don't mumble."

"Yes, ma'am," I said automatically. I raised my voice a few decibels and had another try. "Are you looking for the Special Examination Office?"

The walls threw this all over the

building. Smeltzer's door banged open, and that echoed too.

"Yes, I am," said the old woman.

I sent a mental apology upward, and shrieked, "Right this way, please."

"You needn't shout," said the old woman.

She walked ahead of me, feather waving, coat flapping.

This apparition thrust her china dish under Sam's nose. He looked up and dripped a beetle. "Un-haw," said Sam, recovering slightly. "Miss Grovener will take care of you."

"Speak up, young man," said the old woman.

I touched her shoulder. "May I see the tree, please?" I shouted.

She turned those cutting blue eyes on me again, decided I was incompetent, and turned back to Sam.

He saved the situation by diving under his desk for the beetle. She had to show the tree to me.

It was a lovely little thing, gnarled and elderly as the old woman herself, reposing serenely in its blue china dish.

"It's a rose tree, isn't it?" I screamed.

Sam winced.

"Yes," she said shortly.

I got out a receipt form. "Your name?" I began loudly.

"Mildred Harfluer," she said, hanging onto the dish with one hand.

The form had reassured her. When Council agencies start filling out forms, the public feels that

something is being done. "May I see your passports, please?"

She let go of the dish reluctantly, fished in her bag for the plastileather folder.

"On vacation," I said. I raised my voice. "Since you're here on vacation," I screamed, "why don't you leave the rose tree in quarantine until you're ready to leave?"

"It just says that about the vacation," said Mildred Harfluer, gripping the edge of the dish with both hands. "I really came to Mars to die."

I gaggled over that one, but it didn't seem too unnatural for her to expect death before long. "You'll want it with you, then," I screamed.

She nodded emphatically, her feather waving above her head.

I was in for it. I buzzed Records for the books on Roses Imported to Mars. "What species is it?" I shouted hopefully.

"Miniature," she said firmly.

I was stymied. "A miniature rose tree is unusual, isn't it?" I shouted, hoping to find out circuitously.

"I think it's the only one in existence," she said proudly. "It was started by my great-great-great grandfather." She grew more confidential. "He was a missionary to the Japanese."

I smiled brightly and went back to the receipt form. "You're from the U. S. N. A.," I said.

"Speak up, young woman."

"You're from the United States of North America," I repeated, louder.

"Vermont," said Mildred Harfluer.

Length of stay: indefinite, I wrote. Description of article: miniature rose tree in blue china bowl. Reason for retention: Terra import, species uncertain.

"Sam, that is, Mr. Graff, will identify your rose and O.K. it." I was getting hoarse. "Where will you be staying? We'll send you word when you can pick it up."

"I'll wait here," said Mildred Harfluer.

"But it may take all day today, and part of tomorrow," I screamed.

She wavered. "I've got to get some more batteries," she said. "I'll sign your paper, but I'll be back."

She took her half of the identicket in a firm hand and trundled out.

"She has a hearing aid after all," I said. "Now we'll be able to reason with her."

"Want to bet?" Sam muttered. He was bent over the beetle book. His neck was red.

"Sam, are you angry?"

"No," said Sam slowly. "I just wonder what you have against Professor Phillips, and why you don't want his collection of Martian beetles to go to Terra."

"I'll do the rose," I said indignantly. "I wouldn't dream of taking you from your precious bugs."

"Beetles," said Sam, "are not bugs."

"It's pretty isn't it?" I said, touching a leaf of the rose tree with a fingernail.

"Ancient," said Sam.

"Don't you want to look at it?" I asked.

"No," said Sam quietly, turning red around the ears.

I memorized the leaf pattern of the little rose tree, and set to work industriously as soon as Records sent in the rose books. I had ruled out six possibilities when Mildred Harfluer came back.

"You see, Miss Harfluer," I said, "there are three books of plates to go through. You can't possibly wait."

She picked up the rose tree and glared at me. "I'll wait," she said firmly.

I had to keep on going through the rose plates. I had looked through about half of the first book when the time came to leave. Sam put down the beetle he was working on, and reached for his windbreaker.

"Found five of the little devils," he said cheerfully. "It's been a good day."

"We go home now, Miss Harfluer," I said hopefully. "You see that I haven't found it yet. I'll keep trying tomorrow."

She started toward the door.

"You'll have to leave the rose here," I said apologetically.

"Then I'm staying with it," Mildred Harfluer said, sitting down with a plunk.

"We'll take good care of it," Sam said, helpfully.

"What do you know about miniature rose trees?" she demanded.

Sam hemmed and shut up.

"We are both biotechs," I said. "We'll see that it gets water and sun."

The ice-blue eyes went through me again. "And suppose it starts to grow?" she asked.

I shut up. Sam slipped out the door. I ran after him.

"Look, pal," I whispered, making the corridor hiss all around us, "you can't leave me here. I'm afraid I won't be able to get rid of her, and I can't leave her alone. She waited all day. She might wait all night."

"I'll send you some coffee and two cheese sandwiches," said Sam. "Sleep tight." He pulled his sleeve out of my hand and vanished down the grav shaft. "I'll relieve you in nine hours," his voice echoed back.

"Give my love to George on your way out," I called.

Smeltzer's door banged open, and I retreated into the office.

Mildred Harfluer and I glared at each other for a moment, and then I went back to the rose book. The last office doors banged. In the ensuing silence I could hear faint crashes as the porters went on smashing luggage. It was all very depressing.

Half an hour later the coffee and sandwiches arrived. I had hoped that the smell of food might starve Mildred out, but dear, thoughtful Sam had sent enough for two.

"Thank you, young woman," said Mildred Harfluer. She bit into a sandwich in a manner not quite

ladylike enough to disguise her hunger.

"My name is Carrie," I said, the coffee warming my throat.

"You can call me Miss Millie," she said, unexpectedly gracious.

I smiled.

"I appreciate your working overtime, and all," she said. "I'm sorry to be stubborn about the rose, but it's important that I keep it with me."

"Oh, I don't think you're being stubborn," I said politely, biting into a sandwich. The cheese was a little older than Miss Millie and nearly as brittle.

"I'm glad you see how important it is," she said.

"Would you mind telling me why it's so important?" I asked.

"If you won't think it odd," said Miss Millie doubtfully. "It's all true, every word."

"I'm sure it is."

She leaned forward a little and lowered her voice. "Well, my great-great-great grandfather died at age ninety-four," she said expressively.

I nodded, wondering where this would take us.

"He killed himself," she continued, dabbing at her mouth with her handkerchief, and taking a sip of coffee.

I choked on a piece of cheese.

"My great-great grandfather killed himself at ninety-six, my great grandfather at ninety-nine, my grandmother at one hundred and one, and my father at one hundred

and two." She paused and looked at me. "I will be one hundred and six in four months."

I gasped. "Congratulations." That was all I could think of.

She hunched her shoulders secretly, and leaned farther forward. I leaned back. "I'm determined to die a natural death," she said. "I heard that heart cases on Mars have to go back to Terra to survive. I've had four attacks on Terra. Each one of them should have been fatal." She looked indignant. "Now I've come to Mars."

I assumed she was harmless. "How did you get by the medics?" I asked.

"My heart gets a little better after each attack," she said gloomily.

"Why don't you just let the rose tree die?" I said, with my best *Alice in Wonderland* logic.

"I want to beat the curse," she said, glaring at the rose.

"Isn't it suicide to come to Mars with a weak heart?"

She nodded. "We can't break away from it all at once," she said. "This way is a little better than a knife or a rope." She finished her sandwich and started in on the coffee in earnest. "You see, I've no one to leave it to, so it will go to a botanical garden. I don't want an innocent curator or attendant to be visited with the curse."

"A lot of people wouldn't think of immortality as a curse," I pointed out.

"When they got as old and creaky as I am, they would," she

said. "I get weaker all the time. I'm deaf now, and soon will be blind and bedridden. If I ever break a bone, it will never heal."

The office seemed colder and darker. I felt sorry for Miss Millie, suffering under her imaginary curse. "What color are the blossoms?" I asked, pulling the rose book toward me.

"It has never bloomed," said Miss Millie.

She took the second book to Sam's desk. I worked as quickly as I could, still hoping to find the thing before Sam got there.

I finished the first book, and started through the third. Miss Millie was about a quarter through hers.

The night ship from Luna City came, shaking the building.

The rose kept vibrating after the rest of the room quieted down.

"It moves around like that sometimes," said Miss Millie. "Usually when it's in the sun."

I kept on with the plate comparison.

Sam came in about half an hour after that, needing a shave. The rose tree was still fluttering.

"You are an angel," I said, pushing an arm into my windbreaker.

"Have a bite before you go?" Sam held out a thermolunch.

"No thanks," I said. "What I want is sleep."

I was never so glad to lie down in my life.

Nine hours later, the rose tree, rose books, and Miss Millie were

gone. There was Sam, peering at the beetle book with red eyes. He needed a shave worse than ever.

"You identified it?" I said joyfully.

Sam shook his head. "It's not in the books," he said. "They've gone over to the bot lab to be tested."

"If she doesn't get some sleep soon, it'll kill her," I said.

"That's the idea, isn't it?" Sam said wearily.

"She told you about the rose tree?"

"And her great-great-great grandfather, who committed suicide at the age of ninety-six," Sam groaned, "and her grandfather who shot himself at the age of one hundred and one. And Miss Millie will be one hundred and six in four months."

"It was her grandmother," I said, "who shot herself."

Sam sighed.

"Look, Sam," I said. "She's awfully old, after all, and she's getting feeble. I feel sorry for her."

"Me, too," Sam admitted.

"You go home," I said. "I'll hold the fort."

"Hah!" said Sam. "The fort, maybe, but how about the beetles?"

"I swear by the sands of Mars," I said solemnly, "that I will do beetles all day long."

He didn't seem convinced, but he was too sleepy to resist.

I decided to fool him, and went at the beetles with vim. By lunch time, I had identified nine of the little beasts, two above the previous

record for any one day, so I took my lunch, and Miss Millie's, over to the bot lab.

Somebody had loaned her a blanket, and she had set up house-keeping in the Ladies' Lounge. She was doing up her hair when I walked in. She looked as fresh as paint.

"How about some breakfast?" I asked.

"Thank you, Carrie," she said. "I just woke up, and I must say, I had a wonderful sleep."

I set the tray on the table, and we fell to.

"How's the rose?" I asked.

"Fine," she said cheerfully. "It's in that next room, there. They brought in a chair for me. They've been working on it while I was asleep."

"They won't hurt it, I'm sure," I said.

She nodded. "I told them about it," she said confidently. "They know how important it is to me."

I recognized the fine hand of Fergusson in this. Fergusson is the Casanova of the Research Department. He can make any woman believe anything. I saw Miss Millie seated safely in his lair, and returned to the blessed beetles.

An hour later, I received a procession, Fergusson opened the door with a flourish, and handed over Miss Millie and her rose, together with his report.

"Such a nice young man," said Miss Millie, putting the rose in the sun on Sam's desk. "He had the touch brought over and put in the

Ladies' Lounge here, in case I wanted to lie down." She looked at me, smiling. "He said I would be out before closing time this evening. He said all you have to do is read his report and sign it. That won't take long, will it?"

"That depends on what's in the report," I said. "You'd better hang your coat up."

She looked at me suspiciously, but she put her coat in Sam's locker. She went over to his desk, and picked up a beetle.

I opened Fergusson's report. It was verbose and difficult. Fergusson fancies himself a poet.

I began to hear a whispering noise, and looked up, wondering if Miss Millie had started to talk to herself.

She was turning the pages of the beetle book, absorbed and anxious. The rose was rustling around in the sun.

I turned my head quickly, to see if the window was open. It wasn't, which cut out the possibility of a draft. All buildings on Mars are draft-proof, on account of the continual wind, and occasional accompanying dust. The rose was waving its leaves by itself.

I dove into the report. The sooner I finished it, the sooner Miss Millie and her rustling rose could pass out of my office and my life.

The whispering grew, until it sounded like the first grade when the teacher's back is turned.

"It never carried on like that before," said Miss Millie.

I turned my head. She looked worried. The rose was fluttering like a song bush in the Mars wind.

"I think I'll move it out of the sun," she said.

"The plant is so fragile that it moves in the slightest current of air," said Fergusson's report. "When even our most sensitive instruments can detect no motion, the plant in question rustles slightly."

"I know, Fergusson, I know," I thought.

On the shady side of the room, the rose rustled more loudly. All at once, the rustling coalesced.

"Miss Millie, Miss Millie," the rose whispered. "Miss Millie."

At this juncture, the intercom mike buzzed.

"Carrie," said George's voice. "I got a man down here, wit a pitcher-thing from Corianna. We never imported nuttin like it before."

"Pitcher," I said hysterically. "What can a pitcher do? Let it go."

"You're da boss," said George.

I cut off the mike. Miss Millie looked like she was going to pass out. "Is it really talking?" she asked faintly.

"Miss Millie, Miss Millie," the rose whispered. "Miss Millie."

I nodded. "It sure is."

Her color began to come back. "I'm glad of that," she said. "I was afraid I was hearing things."

I was not relieved. I buzzed Fergusson. "What did you do to that rose tree?"

"Examined it," he said.

"Did you spray it, or inject it with anything?"

"No. Why?"

"No reason. I was just curious," I said. "Did you have any other plants in the lab?"

"Just the song bushes," he said. "Look, what's this all about?"

"Nothing, really," I said, my mind whirling around. Fergusson has been breeding song bushes for years, trying to get one that will reproduce a musical scale.

"I'll come up and see for myself," he threatened.

"Never mind," I said. "The rose tree has started to talk."

"Talk?"

"Listen." I held the mike down near the tree.

"Miss Millie, Miss Millie," whispered the tree.

"You being funny, Carrie?"

"Word of hono, it talks," I said. "You know how it rustles? Well, now it's rustling what you just heard."

"I'll be right up," said Fergusson.

"Oh, no you don't," I said. "It might have been the song bushes that got it started, and you're covered with stuff from them. We'd better wait until it quiets down, if it does."

"O. K.," said Fergusson. "Don't forget to keep me posted."

I switched off. The rose was still buzzing.

Miss Millie gathered herself together until she looked all stern New Englander, and bent over her

talkative house plant. "What do you want?" she demanded.

"Miss Millie, Miss Millie," the rose tree whispered, fading off into incoherencies.

"Maybe it just mimics speech, like a parrot," I said hopefully. A rose tree that mimics is not as awe-inspiring as a rose tree that talks.

"Miss Millie, Miss Millie," said the rose tree again, more clearly.

"What do you want?" Miss Millie sounded annoyed.

"Miss Millie," the tree whispered, "put me in the sun."

"There's one theory gone," I said.

"Please," the rose added.

"Do you think I should?"

"Please, Miss Millie," said the rose tree, getting louder. "I love the sun."

"It's going to knock all its leaves off, thrashing around like that," Miss Millie said.

"I guess you'd better put it back on Sam's desk."

She lifted the dish gingerly, keeping her hands and arms clear of the fluttering leaves, and set it in the sun.

The rose tree rustled happily. "Now I can sing aloud," it whispered. It began an eerie humming song about the sun, and running water, and the pleasure of being beautiful.

It was too Hans Christian Andersen for words. I called Sam.

When he got there, the rose was singing a song about night and the feeling of starlight on leaves.

"Good grief," Sam said. "How long has this been going on?"

"About an hour," I said. "It was with the song bushes down in the bot lab, and they may have stepped up its output."

"It always rustles in the sun," Miss Millie put in, "even when there isn't any wind, but it's never done anything like this before."

"Get Fergusson up here," said Sam.

"We're waiting for it to quiet down," I said. "Fergusson's always messing around with song bushes. If they caused the trouble, he'll make it worse."

"Ugh," said Sam.

"What are we going to do with it until it quiets down?" Miss Millie asked.

"Kill it?" I suggested. "Solve all our problems at once?"

"It's up to Miss Millie," Sam said firmly. He was pale around the eyes. "It's her rose."

The mike buzzed again. It was Smeltzer's office slave and whipping girl. Sam and I were wanted upstairs.

Smeltzer was red and sputtering. "Look out that window," he roared.

We gazed upon the valuable warehouses blazing in the sun.

"What happened?" asked Sam.

"That is the fault of you two incompetents," Smeltzer raged. "You let a Corianna ceramic through unchecked."

"George's pitcher," I said involuntarily.

Smeltzer turned on me. "So it

was Carrie, this time. Dear little Carrie, shaking her merry curls, too busy to be bothered."

"What happened, exactly?" Sam asked, drawing fire to himself.

"The ceramic came into contact with some atigl spores, and ignited, with a medium-sized explosion," said Smeltzer, falsely calm. "A stevedore barely escaped with his life. Ten million credits worth of goods have been destroyed already, and the fire isn't under control yet." He glowered at me.

"I'm sorry," I said.

Smeltzer burst. "Sorry! So am I. So's the port authority. So's the Council," he screamed. "What were you doing that kept you too busy to look at that ceramic?"

"Reading a report on a miniature rose tree," I said. "New species. Terra import."

"Rose tree! Stars of the Cosmos!"

"This rose tree is different," I said.

"It might be dangerous," Sam said.

"Indeed?" said Smeltzer, quietly, turning blue. "Has it threatened either of you?"

"No, sir," I said, "but it talks."

"And sings," Sam added miserably.

Smeltzer glared at us suspiciously.

"Honestly, Mr. Smeltzer," I said.

"I advise you both to visit a competent psychotech," Smeltzer said. "I expect to find your resignations on my desk tomorrow."

"Just let me use your intercom mike," I said.

Smeltzer waved a hand at it.

I buzzed Miss Millie. "Put the rose on," I said.

The rose was still singing.

"All right," said Smeltzer. "So you've got a singing rose bush . . ."

"Tree," said Sam.

"Rose bush," Smeltzer went on.

"Maybe that's a reason for that bonfire, but it's not good enough. Singing and burning are two different things. You're still fired." He sounded mollified.

"Cheer up," I whispered to Sam in the hall. "He'll hire us again next week. He always does. We'll remind him of the way we tracked down the red clover poison." Red clover runs amuck on Mars and sucks up so much nitrogen that it's poisonous to native wild life.

"I know that," Sam said. "I'm wondering what will happen to Miss Millie and the rose tree until we can get back."

"We'll have to come in tomorrow anyway," I said. "He can't accept our resignations until he gets here."

The rose tree was humming softly and sweetly when we came in.

"It's going to sleep," Miss Millie whispered.

"Do you think we could send for Fergusson?" I asked.

Sam buzzed for Fergusson. "Dance barefoot through those song bushes for a while, and then come up here," he said.

The rose knew Fergusson was

coming even before we heard his feet sending echoes through the hall. "I feel so beautiful, so strange, so happy," it sang. "I love the sun. I love the earth. I love."

"Mars," I said, "does wonderful things for roses."

Fergusson came in. "It seems to have learned some new words."

"It must be the song bushes that do it," Sam said.

"There you are, Miss Millie," I said. "You just have to keep your rose tree away from song bushes, unless you want it to talk."

"Would that be difficult?" Miss Millie asked.

"Song bushes are as prevalent on Mars as milkweed in Vermont."

"I don't know what I'm going to do," said Miss Millie. "I feel so tired and depressed, I'm just about ready to give up." Her Vermont look came back. "It's the rose," she said. "I'm not going to give in to it."

"We'll think of something," I said. "Won't we, Sam, Fergusson?"

"Oh, sure," said Sam.

"We're the experts."

"Well, I won't take my life, even if you can sing," said Miss Millie to her rose.

"Miss Millie," whispered the rose tree. "After all the ages I have lived, at last I'm going to bloom. I believed I didn't want to, but now I know I do."

"Does it answer questions?" Fergusson asked.

"We haven't asked it any," Sam said.

"It's not a Ouija board," I said.

"I don't mean that kind of question," said Fergusson. "What species are you?"

"Miss Millie, Miss Millie," said the tree. "Please bring me some clear water."

Miss Millie went out of the room, glass in hand.

"Let's kill it," I said. "She thinks it keeps her from dying. A short snort of alcohol instead of water will do it, and neither of them will know what happened."

Sam shook his head. "It's Miss Millie's rose."

"Miss Millie, bring me some clear water," said the tree. "I feel so happy and so strange."

"Strange is the word," I said.

"I am going to flower," the rose whispered.

"Do you know what species you are?" Fergusson asked again.

"Miss Millie, some water," said the rose.

"Self-centered, isn't it?" said Sam.

Miss Millie came back in, and poured water into the blue china dish.

"Water, water," the rose tree hissed. It started to sing again.

"Not even a thank you," said Miss Millie.

"Let's see if we can finish those beetles before Smeltzer accepts our resignations," Sam said.

"Anything would be better than watching a rose tree sing," I said.

"I'll leave so it can quiet down again," said Fergusson.

"I feel so wonderful, so strange," it sang. "At last I am going to bloom."

"I wonder what will happen when it blooms," I said.

Miss Millie looked worried. "It never did it before."

"Flower, blossom, bloom," said the rose.

"Look," said Miss Millie. "It has a bud."

"Petal, stamen, pistol, calyx," sang the rose tree.

"Beetles," said Sam firmly.

During the afternoon, we identified three beetles, while the rose tree's song died away, and the bud grew and swelled. Miss Millie watched it.

At quitting time, she seemed calm and contented. "You young people run along home," she said. "I'll take the rose tree into the Ladies' Lounge and have a nice rest."

"Are you sure you'll be all right?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, indeed," said Miss Millie.

"We'll send you some supper," said Sam.

"Do that, please," said Miss Millie.

"That bud will open in the morning," said Sam, sealing his windbreaker.

"I do believe it will," said Miss Millie, pink and smiling.

"She's awfully pleased about the rose tree," I whispered in the grav shaft.

"She looks twenty years young-

er than when she came, Sam agreed.

"I wonder if she'll do anything foolish?" I said.

Sam shook his head. "She's got her curse beat," he said. "Let's go over to Magnus's for dinner."

"We'll send something for Miss Millie from there," I agreed. "Those cheese sandwiches last night were horrors."

Two hours after the next sunrise, I walked into the Ladies' Lounge. Miss Millie was lying on the couch under the window, covered with Fergusson's blanket. I ran toward her, frightened.

She was asleep, smiling and contented. On the table, in the full sunlight, was the blue dish, and the biggest blood red rose I have ever seen. The room was still. The rose tree's leaves were turning brown.

"Miss Millie," I said softly.

She opened her eyes. "Well, my dear?"

"What happened?"

Triumph shone around her. "I waited until the sun rose, and when it bloomed, I took the flower." She touched the rose. "Isn't it lovely?"

"It killed itself, blooming," I said.

Miss Millie nodded.

"Well," I said, recovering. "Now you can come and stay with me, and Sam and I will show you the wonders of Mars."

Miss Millie shook her head, smiling. "Thank you, dear," she said, "but I can't. I've got to go back to Terra. I'm a cardiac, you know."

universe in books

by...Hans Stefan Santesson

Comments on the new books
—on novels and “conventions”
and on other matters which
may perhaps interest you.

I'VE been known to say unkind words about space opera from time to time, and I suspect I will continue to do so, if the circumstances warrant it. However, Poul Anderson's *THE WAR OF TWO WORLDS* (Ace Double Novels, 35 cents) is unusually *good* space opera! There! I've said it!

It's an oversimplification to summarize it, as the publishers do,—“Earth Must Choose—the Martians or the Monsters”. The issue is decidedly less simple, envisaging, as it does, the possibility of cooperation between Martians and our people against a third force, a third element, that menaces the security of both invading Martians and invaded Earth. Intelligence Prime, self-styled Lord of the Solar System and key-figure in the plans of the Tahowwa, is far from a “monster”, and Regelin dzu Coruthan is a decidedly unusual Martian.

And read also the companion volume, John Brunner's *THRESHOLD OF ETERNITY*, the vivid and dramatic story of the meeting, thanks to a twist in Time, of Chantal Varese of London, Lawrence Hawkins of California, and Burma—a man from the 41st Century, and

Another report on some books of interest to science fiction and fantasy readers—and on science fiction fan activities, when these may interest you—it all reflecting the many-sided aspects of life and speculative thought and activities in this field still simply called science fiction.

how these and others help to save this World. A first rate action story, by one of the most interesting writers in the field. Don't miss this Ace novel.

Kenneth F. Gantz, author of *NOT IN SOLITUDE* (Doubleday, \$3.50), is an editor of the Air Force's professional journal of strategy and techniques, *The Air University Quarterly Review*, and is the editor of *The United States Air Force Report on the Ballistic Missile*. As a result, *NOT IN SOLITUDE* is an exciting and plausible novel about the first of our people to arrive on Mars and the conditions they are likely to encounter. There are moments when Dr. John Dane, newspaperman and physicist, may seem to have some of the qualities of the idiot hero in some mystery novels you can recall. Dane gets an obvious, almost masochistic delight out of his frequent tangling with Colonel Cragg, commander of the expedition to Mars. But Cragg's doubts about Dane change as—no, I'd better not go on. Read *NOT IN SOLITUDE* instead. You'll enjoy it!

THE FITZGERALD REPORT, a pamphlet published by the UFO Research Committee of Akron, Box 5242, Akron 13, Ohio, at \$1., reports on a sighting in Ohio this fall and on the Air Force handling of the subsequent investigation. The Committee expresses considerable dissatisfaction with this investiga-

tion, which it feels is typical of the treatment given UFO reports over the past ten years. In fact the Committee uses some rather unfortunate language in making this point, which does not encourage faith in their own objectivity.

It's quite possible that I am wrong, but a description of how some people—thrown together by a cataclysm—somehow survive that cataclysm, is not necessarily science fiction. John Bowen's *AFTER THE RAIN* (Ballantine Books, 35 cents) describes such a cataclysm and the behavior of a group of people, thrown together by circumstances beyond their control, as they struggle and scheme and fight to survive in a world where familiar mores and the familiar things that guide you are no longer present. Angus Wilson, describes it, with some justification, as "a satire of the first order," and to the extent that it takes apart, with superb British quietness, some very distressingly credible people,—to that extent it *is* a satire of how we would behave, facing such situations as these people do. But *is* this Science Fiction? Hm . . .

James Blish's *THE TRIUMPH OF TIME* (Avon, 35 cents) is another novel, apparently the final novel, about John Amalfi and the way of life which that incredible man rules. Ruled. As is usually the case with a novel by the author of *A CASE OF CONSCIENCE* (Ballantine, 35 cents) there is an ap-

proach to history and, in this case, to the finite quality of that history, signally lacking in the writing of some one can think of . . . The fact that there are some unusual people working in this field, genuinely dedicated craftsmen, people with vision — with imagination — and with the ability for compassion, at least in their writing, is perhaps a reason why the field has survived the flocking to it of people who were (and are) neither dedicated nor compassionate. James Blish is one of these unique craftsmen, and in this novel of the passing of a way of life he has some beautiful and sensitive passages. Do read this. But *don't* read it if you're looking just for relaxation

Alfred Bester's *THE DEMOLISHED MAN* (Signet, 35 cents) has just been reissued. I am frank to admit that I have never been too fond of this novel of a 24th century man who commits murder in a crime-proof society, but those of you who missed it (*were there any, I wonder?*) should certainly read it.

Edmund Cooper, as readers of this magazine have already discovered, likes to wander far in space, fascinated by the riddle of time, interested in people and how they will behave, given certain situations. *TOMORROW'S GIFT* (Ballantine Books, 35 cents) is a group of ten stories by the author of *DEADLY IMAGE*, stories which have ap-

peared in this magazine, in the *Saturday Evening Post*, and elsewhere. Don't miss this.

Anthony Boucher's *THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION* (Doubleday, \$3.75) is with us again. This eighth appearance of the anthology has some lovely stories, including Fritz Leiber's *A DESKFUL OF GIRLS* and Avram Davidson's delightful *THE GRANTHA SIGHTING*. Do read this.

Some of you will recall that we ran a brief article by Sam Moskowitz in this column, some months ago, which stressed the importance of conference committees incorporating, in the interest of contributing conference "members" who are in effect—when contributing their dollar or two dollars—co-sponsors of the conference and thus technically responsible, in the event of any deficit, whether or not they actually attended the conference. I still agree with Sam, and this on the basis of more than twenty-five years of organizational experience.

Few tears seem to have been shed for book dealers at the January 4th meeting of the Eastern Science Fiction Association in Newark where dealers and collectors, including Julius Unger and Milton Spahn, Sam Moskowitz and Henry Moskowitz (not relations!), joined in a discussion of Dealing in and Collecting Science Fiction. We are told

"some amusing episodes of outwitting book dealers were related." The meeting ended with a dramatic reading of science fiction poetry by Sam Moskowitz and his wife, Dr. Christine H. Moskowitz.

The previous weekend, this column had looked in on the Fanarcon, "New York's Own Beatnick Con" (to quote the invitations), an interesting experience. While I am afraid I would question the interest in Science Fiction of some of those present (I am not necessarily thinking of the lean young man seated in a Buddha pose on a rug, in the middle of the floor, while all sorts of characters swirled around him . . .), the affair was certainly well attended. More than a hundred people, including fans from Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit and the Village, attended the three day con (which included a showing of the Czech film *Krakatit*, based on Karel Capek's novel). Perhaps the most impressive participant, in a way, was a Canadian bagpipe player, complete with kilt and cigar. When he stopped to breathe, the hi-fi set would go on.

There have been some interesting reactions to Harry Harrison's letter in our last issue. A correspondent in Dunbar, West Virginia, wrote Harry that the trouble was that "Fandom is no longer independent", while a local reader (incidentally an officer of a local group) wrote:

"Isn't it possible that the reason fans no longer talk about science fiction is that there isn't anything to talk about? I don't know whether the change is in myself, or in the science-fiction that is being written and printed nowadays, but I find that s-f falls into the category of light, relaxing reading for me, and I rarely find a story that makes enough of an impact on me to be remembered long enough to come up in discussion."

What do the rest of you think? Is she right?

The Detroit Committee reports that it's beginning to look like the *Detention*—the 17th World Science Fiction Convention—will be the biggest World Convention in years. The number of memberships already received has gone beyond all expectations—more than 200 as of January 1st.

Meanwhile, the program is beginning to shape up. In addition to the items reported last time, a collector's panel has been scheduled, with Dr. C. L. Barrett as chairman. Doc Barrett owns one of the biggest science fiction collections in the country. Isaac Asimov, who obviously needs no introduction, has agreed to serve as toastmaster at the banquet, where he will introduce everyone else.

Membership in *Detention* is \$2. (\$1. overseas). To join—or simply to get more details—write *Detention* at 12011 Kilbourn, Detroit 13, Michigan. *Detention* meets Labor

Day weekend at Detroit's Pick-Fort Shelby Hotel.

Apparently ESFA is determined to prove Harry Harrison wrong when he suggested, in last month's *FU*, that "SF fandom as I knew it is dead."

The Newark fan group, headed this year by Alex Osheroff, *Director*, and Belle Dietz, *Vice-Director*, announced a discussion of "the state of the Weird and Fantastic in Fiction" for their February meeting, just as we were going to press.

And assorted ghosts shuddered, we understand, as members of the Futurians (sponsors of the *Fanarcon*, commented on above) heard a talk, the previous weekend, on "The Secret History of the First Futurians."

Readers will recall the excellent series of articles on UFO sightings and phenomena, prepared specially for this magazine by the Research Section of Civilian Saucer Intelligence of New York. Members and friends of CSI will celebrate that organization's Fifth Anniversary at a meeting at the Hotel Diplomat, 43rd Street near Sixth Avenue, in New York, Friday evening at 8:30 P.M., March 27th. Speakers announced, as we go to press, include Major Donald E. Keyhoe of NICAP, and John Nebel. Admission will be \$1.50.

"Long John" Nebel, as we have said in this column previously, has what is undoubtedly the most un-

usual program on the air today. Night after night, in 27 states, people stay awake from midnight to 5:30 in the morning to hear all sorts of topics, from the exotic to the anti-exotic, discussed over WOR on "Long John's Party Line." Guests on the program have included *Fantastic Universe* authors Ivan T. Sanderson, Lester del Rey, Isabel Davis of CSI, and Morris K. Jessup, and others interested in UFOlogy and also *other* subjects such as juvenile delinquency, minority problems, and others of our social ills. "The Party Line" has come to be recognized as a platform for the exchange of views and opinions on a variety of subjects—views and opinions which some may not always agree with but the airing of which represents a continuation, on the air, of the old Town Meeting principle. As such, the program is important and merits our respect.

Just as we went to press, we received an advance copy of Isaac Asimov's *NINE TOMORROWS* (Doubleday, \$3.50). Dr. Asimov is of course one of the most important—and interesting—of the writers in this field, important because of his ability to combine scientific fact with the unpredictable and *un*-scientific actions of that Man who may inherit the possible Tomorrow. His people—and his Intelligences—are therefore real and vivid, as, for instance, in *THE GENTLE VULTURES*. Don't miss this!

the amnesic men

by . . . John Victor Peterson

A gleaming metallic tape crept through an autopilot/computer, nearing its end. Those who fascinatedly watched it knew the Starship approached destination.

Abruptly relays were clicking. Anticipatory excitement leaped in the hearts of the crew as keyers activated retranslation apparatus. Their eyes gleamed with tearfilled release as the ship emerged from the featureless deep purple of hyper-space into starshot normalcy above Sol's ecliptic plane.

Home!

Home in bewildered thankfulness but, curiously, without sense of loss.

There had been loss—loss beyond their capacity to recall.

Which those awaiting their return would instantly recognize.

But, for the greater part, soon forget—

Venus! She remembered the harsh record of history and shuddered at the thought of the many men who had died.

IT WAS early morning. Bright sunlight streaming through her apartment's windows failed to bolster Dr. Martha Cowan's waning spirits.

She stood dully surveying the dark roofs of Baltimore's older quarter from the twentieth floor of

John Victor Peterson, prominent in the field for many years, returns after a much too long absence from these pages with this story of an expedition to a distant earth-type planet inhabited by very friendly, and cooperative humanoids. But what was the secret of this strange planet?

Doctors' Quarters at Space Medicine Institute.

Will there ever be an end to waiting? she thought, her sensitive features somber. *Will I ever see Pat again?*

It had been a year since the Starship's vanishment into hyperspace on its maiden interstellar voyage—to Barnard's Star which radio-astronomy had indicated to be the nearest system with a planet close enough to its primary to be humanly habitable. The ship's return was long overdue.

There had been no word. But then no word could be expected until the ship's return and emergence from hyperspace within reasonable detection distance. Astronomy cannot visually or photographically trace a ship's passage within a spacewarp. Electronics, similarly limited by time and light-speed, cannot track or communicate.

The visifone chimed.

She responded automatically, dully; then viewed her father's smiling face and cried, "Pat's back! The ship's back! You said you'd not call again until it was!"

She choked up. Her dark eyes flooded. Her father waited patiently in the faraway White Sands Spaceport tower.

Finally she said shakily, "I'm sorry, Dad, acting up so."

"You're acting as a grown and loving woman should," he said, ineffable sadness in his tone. His eyes swept her face. She knew he was thinking of her mother.

He, too, had watched the cold, unyielding sky for many an empty, endless night, hopelessly awaiting the return of the torchship which had borne his lovely actress wife on the beginning of a tour of Sol's outer colonies.

He had never accepted, as Martha had, radar evidence that the ship and its late occupants were debris orbiting near Ceres, obviously victims of a breakdown of automatic recycling controls following failure of the main evasion radar amid the asteroids.

For a sudden, savage moment Martha resented the imminence of happiness he could never truly share.

He shook his graying head and said, "The Starship's orbiting at five thousand miles. We've a brief dispatch from Commander Talix, indicating all have returned in good health."

That had been her chief concern—the question of possible infection or mental aberration.

Her father continued, "Chet Talix indicates they found an Earthtype planet inhabited by friendly, cooperative humanoids. Pat certainly chose the right star!

"Of course we must verify the men's health. As a precaution we've sent up the robotic shuttles. Thank God for telemetry; we'll be almost positive of their condition before they surface. It's obligatory. We can't chance another Venus case!"

Venus! She recalled the harsh record of history and shuddered.

Two hundred years before telemetry had shown that those returning from the maiden voyage to Venus had unknowingly contracted a virulent plague. An attempt to cure them had not been chanced; the World President had activated remote keyers which sent the torchship, its attendant shuttles and its crew to sure decontamination: incineration in Sol.

"But, Dad, you said Chet said they're all right!"

He smiled gently. "I'm sorry. It's just that I know how impatient you are. They'll still have to go through decontamination and customs. The clearances will take time.

"Now, come down, Martha. You've security clearance."

"I'm on my way, Dad. Thanks!"

Only after she had excitedly punched the autopilot button which took her gyrotomic moncoupe up from the building's roofstage did she realize that she had failed to call the Desk.

But she was one of dozens training the men who would staff Starship II when it was completed a year hence. Someone would assume her responsibilities: Peter Dowd and Tom Gentry would understand. They knew how she felt about Pat D'Agostino.

And Pat wasn't just another man returning from elsewhere. *He* had conquered interstellar space. He had invented the hyperspace drive, had supervised the building of the Starship, and now had taken man to Barnard's Star and back. He was

most certainly not just another man but one whose name was in everyone's mind, whose name was secure in history.

Detailed testing of the men was purely routine! Every spaceship's crew returning from other worlds was cautiously subjected to telemetric examination before being permitted to surface. And they were brought down in antiseptic robotic shuttles sent up from Earth while their own scoutships remained in the mother ship in the frigid quarantine of space.

Talix had said the men were all right.

Yet she could not help wondering what the surface charts might be recording through telemetry now—

Tremblingly tense, she buttoned the ship's stereo for urgently needed distraction. The news disclosed nothing her father had not already told her.

The moncoupe suddenly began to circle, twisted into Winthrop Field's landing traffic pattern through radar-robotics which brought it swiftly to surface and to the Terminal Building serving both field and spaceport.

Tall, ramrod-straight, her father waited on the ramp.

"Any news of Pat, Dad?"

"Telemetry doesn't check by names," he said gently. "Only ten men have been enshuttled in any event. But I must tell you straight: there's an extreme excitability of their nervous systems."

"May I see, Dad?" she asked with forced calmness.

He walked with her into the Terminal Building, excusing himself abruptly as the public address system blared, "Manager Cowan report to Reception. The Presidential plane is in final approach."

She slipped into the tense semi-darkness of the telemetry room where doctors and electronics specialists were tensely surveying radiant kinescopic charts across which pulsed purple waves spelling out the workings of the enshuttled men's vital organs.

Now she fascinatedly observed the electroencephalographic recordings, expertly noting the slightest peaking of brainwave patterns. Curious—but, again, perhaps not. Certainly the men would be mentally exhilarated, coming home in triumph from the first transit to another star!

Her father's voice came over the public address:

"Your attention, please! Shuttle one is surfacing. No personnel are permitted on the observation ramps or port."

Martha turned alone to a stereo viewer; the others had picked up signals from a second shuttle and were conscientiously continuing work.

As the stern-ended shuttle surfaced on a blazing energy tripod, she recalled Pat's departure a year before. She had clung to him almost frantically then, praying he would not go, knowing the solar

system could not stand his loss, knowing with a deeper conviction that she could not. For only he of all men understood the hyperspace drive and the math behind it. And only he of all men understood her.

A remote controlled gantry moved up to the surfaced shuttle, hesitated for disembarkation of its passengers and withdrew from the radiation-contaminated area.

Stereo cameras traced the gantry's elevator's descent.

Martha instantly recognized the heavy, squarish figure of the first man who emerged; it was Commander Talix—*Cbet, dear friend!*

Others . . . Martha counted them, straining for sight of Pat.

Ten—and Pat was not among them!

She told herself then that he would stay aspace until the last, making certain all was in order. He would be among the last tenth, not the first as when they'd left.

World President Batchelder came on the stereo then from Reception.

"I am pleased to greet the men of the Barnard's Star Expedition but afraid that what I came prepared to say would be redundant. All I will say, Commander Talix, is 'Welcome home!'"

What a pity those two great men could not be face to face, that thronging thousands were not here to greet the returned men with thunderous applause, that those returning must be isolated as potential lepers until the report from the

Starship's surgeon had been verified!

Talix was approaching a remoted camera now. Martha, certain his round, open face would be animated, joyous, was shocked to see a singular dullness instead.

"It's good to be back," Talix said without conviction. "I bring greetings to Sol's people from the nobles of Barnard One and expressions of regret that it was not convenient for the nobles to send an ambassador at this time.

"We truly appreciate your greeting but ask you to give the credit for our success to those who did not go with us, to those who formulated the equations upon which the drive is based."

President Batchelder cut in swiftly, "But, Commander, *one* man—not a group—formulated the equations and designed the drive. Surely *you* know that! Surely you know Patrick D'Agostino deserves *all* the credit!"

"Who?" Talix asked, his face twisted, confused.

"D'Agostino," the President said. "Patrick D'Agostino."

The Commander's round face was expressionless.

"Well, Talix?" Batchelder said with a trace of exasperation.

"I thought you were going to tell me a name," Talix replied.

"Patrick D'Agostino," the President said again. "He was one of the ninety-nine men who accompanied you."

And Talix responded irritably.

"Only ninety-eight men went with me to Barnard's Star. All have returned. There certainly isn't and never was any genius with us such as you've intimated. Now, Mister President, what *was* the name of the alleged superman?"

Martha stood stunned before the stereo in Telemetry. Slowly she became aware that a male doctor was saying something about the Quarantine Room.

"Quarantine?" she echoed.

"We're about to perform exhaustive tests there on Talix and the others. Would you care to join us?"

She nodded and followed the doctor stumblingly, her mind chaotic.

Talix was not a practical joker. In any event, complete public denial of a man's existence at a time of such tremendous historic significance was not the proper subject for a practical joke regardless of any anticipatedly uproarious dénouement.

She had met Chet Talix at the innumerable briefings Pat had held to indoctrinate the Starship's crew, had come to know him well.

There was no logical reason why Chet should disclaim Pat's very existence unless—unless Pat had contracted a leprous alien contagion which had caused his abandonment on Barnard One—or the jettisoning of his disease-wracked body in hyperspace. Could the Starship's psychologists, as a conse-

quence, have conditioned the men to believe that no such companion had ever existed, that even such a name had never been?

"It's a joke, a cruelly ill-timed practical joke," she told herself as they entered Quarantine's console room.

The room's occupants—doctors and electronics specialists—were feverishly manipulating the console's potentiometers.

Behind the double glass partition separating the room from Quarantine proper, Talix and his nine companions were being subjected to integrated clinical tests. Machines, dials and tanks were corroborating the physiographic tests of body functions which had been telemetrically transmitted from the first shuttle.

Martha studied the recorded results. There was no bacterial infection, cellular changes, hyperkinesia—nothing classifiable by symptoms.

Yet there *was* an obvious exhilaration of the men's nervous systems. *Why?*

Psychoanalysts questioned the ten men individually through closed circuit intercoms. When the other nine independently expressed concord with Talix' statements, stereo recordings of the departure for Barnard's Star were flashed before them.

They all swore unhesitatingly and without positive reactions on the polygraphs on the number of the men they counted in the stereo

stills. Their counts amounted to those actually in the stills less one! They named the men they said they saw. They did not name Patrick D'Agostino.

Martha fled the haunted room, racing hysterically up an escalator to the tower where her father sat, his eyes fixed upon radarscopes recording another shuttle's descent.

"Dad," she cried urgently, "*hold me!*"

Caught in his arms, she said almost incoherently, "It's madness, Dad. They say no one of Pat's description was with them. They seem to be stone deaf when his name is spoken, completely blind when it is written. Why? Can't *you* tell me why?"

"Easy, Martha," he said gently. "The doctors will find an explanation. Don't think for a moment that Pat wasn't with them or that he hasn't returned."

His words held convincing fervor. She found momentary assuagement; then realized that, refusing to accept her mother's tragic death, he undoubtedly thought she should similarly reject the possibility that Pat was lost forever.

"Dad," she cried, near hysteria, "are you—"

The visifone's chime interrupted. One of her father's arms moved from her to answer it. She recognized the caller's voice instantly: that of the chief psychoanalyst in Quarantine.

"Mr. Cowan, we've completed the tests. It's obvious these men are

both physically and mentally acceptable. We're convinced there never was a man associated with the expedition with a name like—" He paused. "—well, whatever it was!"

Her mind was caught then in a maelstrom and she forced her face almost suffocatingly against her father's taut chest.

"I understand," Tom Cowan said. "I'll clear the others to surface without further examination."

She fought fearfully free from him, cringing back against the radar console.

"Dad, can't you see?" she cried. "He's a somnambule like Talix and the others now. Someone in Barnard's Star performed somnambulistic hypnosis on those men—and it's *infectious!*"

There was upon his face the same robotic look that had been on Chester Talix'.

"Dad!" She slapped his face stingingly.

He touched his reddening cheek and said bewilderedly, "Martha, why are you so upset?"

"Because of Pat," she cried. "Because you don't believe in Pat!"

"Because of whom?"

His expression was almost idiotic.

"Oh, God!" she screamed and ran from him, down an escalator and out on Winthrop Field, not knowing where she was going but only that she must flee the now

fully freed posthypnotic virulence of the returned men.

A stratojet was being readied for takeoff. She hurried up its ramp, frantically clutching at the closing door.

A man attempted to thrust her away, rasping, "Stand back. This is the President's plane."

"I must see him! I must see the President!" she cried.

The man hesitated, turned, saying, "It's a woman, sir, who says—"

"I'm Doctor Cowan," she cut in breathlessly.

Suddenly President Batchelder was confronting her, saying, "You must be Tom Cowan's girl. What's wrong?"

"They all swear Pat D'Agostino wasn't on the ship!"

"*All* of them? That's curious, I thought it a mental aberration personal to Talix. Well, *we* know D'Agostino *was* on the trip. And, my dear, I still think it may be a practical joke and that D'Agostino will be the last man to surface with a quip climaxing Talix' pronouncement!"

They hadn't touched the President's mind. Apparently neither his exposure nor her own had been sufficiently direct for that!

"Oh, God!" she said hoarsely, "if it were only that! But it's not; it's more, much more! I *must* go with you." Her voice rose. "In God's name, *please!*"

The tenth and final robotic

shuttle homed in on the Starship in the dark loneliness of her orbit.

Eight men staggered toward the juxtaposed locks, brandishing bottles of medicinal alcohol purloined from the dispensary for this very special occasion.

A ninth man lingered, completely oblivious to his fellows' drunken summons; then turned with robotic precision toward the now silent autopilot/computer.

There was something—something he must do . . .

His trembling hand reached for the tiered potentiometers and began twisting them from zero settings.

16-1-20-18-9-3-11-

He paused wearily, brushing his right forearm across his brows; then abruptly continued.

Done!

He removed the perforated tape from the autopilot/computer and turned its glistening thread in his hands, hesitating.

"Come on, lieutenant," one of the others cried, stumbling toward him, "let's drink to good old Earth!"

The lieutenant ignored him. Pulse accelerated, he bent to the mechanism, reversing the tape, preparing to feed it. The other slipped, falling against him heavily. The lieutenant's temple struck against the equipment's edge. His mind went into strangely welcome night.

"I'm sorry, lieutenant . . ." The drunken man's voice trailed off. "Hey, fellas, he's cold as space!

And, damn it, I dropped my bottle!"

"Le's gittim in th' shuttle," another said thickly.

The tape lay amidst shards of glass in a slowly spreading pool of alcohol on the deserted Starship's deck.

Waiting for another hand.

As the stratojet sped toward New York, Martha related all she had witnessed at White Sands. President Batchelder immediately caused a receiver to be buttoned to Solar News.

Martha concentrated on the cast, seeking clues to the strange rejection of Pat in the newsman's revelations of what the expedition's members had experienced on Barnard One—or what they *thought* they had experienced.

They had reportedly met and throughout their stay only associated with male nobles of the alien race. Male commoners they had seen only from a distance working in the fields. Of females of the race they had seen nothing.

The newscaster said there was only one city—a beautiful, towering, ultra-modernistic metropolis, evidently product of a highly advanced anthropology. He blandly continued with the paradox that there was no apparent industry, commerce or scientific research in progress, no vehicular or aerial traffic, no roadways—only footpaths which the commoners followed going to and from work in

the surrounding fields, the *only* signs of activity being rather primitively agricultural.

It didn't add. Why would a race whose artifacts were so advanced pursue agriculture and nothing else?

And yet, if Patrick D'Agostino had been erased from the crew's minds, what else might have been erased—or added?

The newsman turned then to what he lightly called, "The Legend of the Mastermind."

He called it a Paul Bunyon complex, blaming an unknown Winchell for creating a mental giant to symbolize man's drive into interstellar space; then he laughingly said that if someone knew the legendary one—whatever his name was—he'd better do it fast since certain drive activation data appeared to have been lost.

"The pattern is showing now," Martha said bitterly.

The President bowed his head without comment.

"It's an obvious attempt to blot the memory of Pat from the minds of men," she continued. "You must seal off the White Sands-Santa Fe area before it is spread further."

"You've noticed I've used no video on the stereo. My aide has sent a message denying stereo time to the expedition's members. What persuasion they may be able to exert to circumvent my order I do not know. We can only hope *none*.

"I feel sure that D'Agostino did

not return. I also feel the Starship's medics could not conceivably have produced this infectious amnesic hypnosis. It *must* come from an alien causative agent!"

Martha burst, "And almost everyone he personally trained is within the infection area! He taught the drive activation data only to key personnel—but *I* was at the briefings. *I* learned the data, too! I couldn't forget the data ever unless I were to forget Pat and the personal training he gave. Wipe out the one and you wipe out the other.

"The Starship's orbiting empty now at five thousand miles. They'll probably send up a skeleton crew soon since the Interstellar Board's convinced there's no infection aboard.

"We must reach the ship first and return to Barnard's Star. The trainees at Space Medicine Institute can help me with the transits. My colleagues will come to try to combat whoever or whatever implanted the infection in the minds of those poor men.

"We've got to take the chance. We've got to do it now before we all become amnesic! We've got not just Pat to lose but the stars!"

President Batchelder was staring blindly out at fleeting strato-cirrus clouds strung thinly across the afternoon sky.

"There's an immediate way, thank God!" he said. "The torchship *Gegenschein* is about to leave Balti-

more Friendship Spaceport for Mars. It can be routed via the Starship. I'll order it to hold blastoff for you and the others." He reached for an air-ground visifone.

"May I call the Institute? I've got to get the men there before—" Her voice trailed off.

Wordlessly he indicated another visifone.

Time tumbled.

She stood atop the *Gegen-schein's* attendant gantry's ramp, immediately adjacent to the port's closing mechanism, her mind crying *Hurry! Hurry!* to the last of her colleagues. The Starship's prospective new crew was already aboard.

She looked across Baltimore Friendship Spaceport toward the terminal building where she had bade farewell to President Batchelder. He had held the latest stereofax, headlined

**STARSHIP CREW EXPLODES
SUPER-MATHEMATICIAN
MYTH**

*Worldwide Stereocasts
Scheduled by Crew*

Batchelder's face had been gray; he had sickeningly realized that his direct orders had been circumvented.

"We're depending on you, Martha," he had said . . .

The last man was aboard, the last cargo handler going out. A turbojet police car lanced across the field from the terminal building. A purposeful officer descended and rushed toward the ramp, crying, "Presi-

dent's orders: the ship is grounded!"

They had reached Batchelder, too!

Thank God he had ordered communications silence for the *Gegen-schein* until after rendezvous with the Starship!

No one but she and the turning handler could have heard. She acted then with primitive instinct, forgetting the holstered stungun Dr. Dowd had brought her. Her sharply out-thrust right hand caught the handler in the chest, toppling him backward with startled outcry to collide with the ascending officer.

She entered the ship, instantly activating the port's closing mech and buttoning the intercom.

"Doctor Cowan to Control," she said tersely. "Alert for blastoff!"

Through the port's viewscreen, she saw the handler and policeman fleeing from the imminent blast area, impelled by the torchship's screaming siren.

She hastily entered an acceleration couch as the torchship's commander started the countdown. There was the sudden, mighty thrust of the fission-charged jets. They were away!

G's pressed inexorably — G's coupled with exhaustion . . .

And suddenly, it seemed, her close friend and associate, Dr. Peter Dowd, was bending over her concernedly, saying, "Are you okay, Martha? We've rendezvoused with the Starship!"

The airlocks had been juxtaposed and sealed. Martha crossed the coupling and unhesitatingly activated the Starship's lock—a mechanism made deliberately simple, since who in Sol would ever dream of stealing the Starship?

She went forward to Astrogation, approached the autopilot/computer, and stopped, perplexedly regarded the metallic tape amidst shattered glass on the deck; then raised her gaze to the potentiometers.

16-1-20-18 . . .

The key setting was already made!

She had only to doublecheck the star-fix with Control, to reinsert the tape and then to press the master activator to launch the ship again toward Barnard's Star.

"Oh, Pat!" she cried.

The lonely echo of her voice alone came back.

Resignedly she returned to the lock corridor, supervised the cross-over and sent the men quickly to their posts. The *Gegenschein* had fallen away and blasted into a trajectory for Mars.

She returned then to the autopilot/computer, tremblingly inserted the equation tape; then buttoned the intercom resolutely.

"Doctor Cowan to Control," she said.

Montemurro, the trainee commander, acknowledged.

"Tony," she said, "fix on Barnard's Star. Parallax point five three zero, proper motion ten point three zero. Extrapolate arrival posi-

tion against lapse of six point one light-years squared to the cube of the parallax."

Montemurro verified.

"Prepare for hypertransit!" Martha cried into the public address. A moment later she prayerfully pressed the master activator.

Nothing seemed to happen. She felt no physical reaction yet in a viewscreen the stars abruptly dimmed and vanished into featureless deep purple as Pat had said they would.

She turned elatedly from the console.

Sudden shock drained her residual strength. Confronting her were the silently accusing figures of Chester Talix and her father. Her right hand, reaching for her stungun, fell strengthless to her side.

Before their staring eyes her mind whirled into madness, recently-surg-ing thoughts of Pat tearing into shreds of disassociated memory under the impulse of some psychic centrifuge.

She screamed and knew night . . .

Awareness returned. She was lying on the deck near the unconscious body of her father. Peter Dowd was standing over him, a stungun in hand.

"Sorry, Martha," he said. "I had to do it when I saw your face."

"But where's Talix?" she asked anxiously, regaining her feet unsteadily.

"Talix?" Dowd echoed. "My God, was *he* here, too?"

"Yes. And thank God I fainted! Pete, you should have seen his eyes!" She shuddered. "They probe your mind and tear it!"

"But where could he have gone? He didn't go forward; I came from the control room."

"Let's go there!"

They rushed to Control. Montemurro turned from the console.

"Tony," Martha cried, "lock all compartments. The contra-meteor lock—there!"

She turned to Dowd. "That will contain him momentarily. It seals off each compartment so atmosphere won't be lost in case of a meteor penetration. Now, Pete, I want you and Gentry to take my father to the isolation room and revive him. Tony will activate the individual compartment locks so you can pass. Use hypnotherapy the moment my father regains consciousness. Try the Garland-Sosnowski technique coupled with hypnotic discs. You and Gentry will be kept under surveillance. If my father is a carrier and therapy fails you'll both have to be kept in Isolation, too."

He nodded grimly; then said, "It won't fail, Martha!"

She turned to the scanning board as Dowd departed, began viewing the ship's other compartments one by one. What she saw in nearby compartments caused no alarm. Her colleagues were either sleeping or pursuing various activities in a normal manner. But as she went from pickup to pickup she saw crewmen staring into nothingness with the

vacuous aspect of hypnotic amnesia.

Where was Talix? Had his post-hypnotic mission been to gain access to the nuclear reactor powering the drive if faced with the possibility of non-amnesic men seizing the Starship? Then to bring the pile to critical mass? Or to threaten to do so unless they went to him for—for forgetfulness?

Oh, thank God! she thought. The scanner was picking up the sealed-off compartment directly adjacent to the reactor room where protective garments were donned before men entered the radioactivity emanating from the pile. Talix stood there, a terrible, unearthly rage upon his distorted face. As if sensing her watching eyes, his eyes swung toward the pickup.

She switched the scanner off, frightened, trembling, knowing his eyes would strip her memory now, knowing her will had already been blunted.

For the moment Talix was harmless.

She grew a little calmer; then re-activated the scanner, buttoning the pickup in the hull hangar. She immediately spotted a shuttle among the berthed scoutships. Apparently Talix and her father had reached the Starship before the *Gegenschein*. Radar would have warned them otherwise.

She established another fact: a scoutship was missing. The ship normally carried twelve. Since none had descended to Earth and the hangar now held only eleven, one

had obviously remained in Barnard's Star. Was it now awaiting the Starship's emergence from hyperspace?

The plot included not only theft of the memory and accomplishments of Pat D'Agostino but undoubtedly theft of the Starship as well.

Switching off the scanner, she hurried to the corridor outside Isolation and peered through a unidirectional view-screen. She was only just in time: her father was stirring, rising now. She could see him in profile.

Within the semi-darkness of the isolation room mechanical hypnosis equipment activated by Peter Dowd performed involved rotations. Hypnotic discs spiraled into a maelstrom-infinity. Multi-hued lights flickered and swayed, cobra-shafts beyond the spotlight which blazed remorselessly into Tom Cowan's disturbing eyes.

Dowd's gentle voice began, "We want to help you to remember a great and good man, a comrade someone has convinced you that you have never known. But you haven't forgotten him, Tom, you haven't forgot Patrick D'Agostino. Your daughter Martha, Tom—why, Martha's engaged to Pat. You should well remember that time back at the Sands—"

Rise and fall of finely trained voice, persuasively weaving a mesmeric spell.

Tom Cowan shook his graying head, shut his eyes against the spotlight's blaze, opened them again and kept his gaze averted, fixed first

upon the spiraling discs; then upon the chatoyant lights . . .

It seemed like days but was only eight taut hours before Tom Cowan suddenly cried out, "My God! must you keep telling me what I already know? Certainly I know Pat D'Agostino! Why in Heaven's name shouldn't I?"

It was Martha who told him.

But the hypnotic prowess of Chester Talix' aberrated mind was not so easily to be bested.

It was only hours after Martha had left her father and had fallen into exhausted sleep in her cabin that Montemurro called her urgently from control.

"Talix is in the reactor room," Montemurro said. "Bill Rowe'd taken over control and apparently responded to an intercom call from the ready room where Talix was. I'd told Bill not to; he must have answered automatically. It's lucky I'd forgotten my pipe and wanted a smoke. I went back and found Bill glassy eyed, nearly unconscious—he must have a low threshold to hypnosis—and I used my stungun without asking any questions. I threw back the contra-meteor lock but Talix managed to get into the reactor room while Rowe'd had it switched off."

She curbed angry words on her tongue; the damage was done. "Have Rowe brought to Isolation," she said. "Stay in Control yourself; I'll join you soon."

Quickly she aroused Dowd and

Gentry. "I know you're exhausted," she said quickly, "but we've got to work fast. You brought my father out of the second-stage spell he was in. You've got to bring Rowe out now—and fast. Talix may be deciding to infect us all, one by one. If we can manage to restore the men as quickly as he infects them—and we've got to!—we may still win! Will you try?"

"You're damned right we will!" Dowd said.

She hurried to Control. The intercom was buzzing madly. The red light on the board said *Reactor Room*. She looked at Montemurro. He shrugged his heavy shoulders helplessly.

"Kill the video pickup," she said. "Remove the 1X2Z from the master unit; it won't affect the audio circuit."

Montemurro moved tiredly to respond.

She turned on the intercom and said, "Control!"

"This is Commander Talix," the speaker rasped. "You will immediately cut the contra-meteor lock and direct all personnel to proceed singly to the reactor room."

The voice held incredible strength of command; she caught herself reaching for the public address button.

She began to tremble. Montemurro came up behind her and gripped her shoulders with his big hands. She felt a sharp fear before she realized that he was only seeking to steady and encourage her.

"Yes, Commander," she said and cut the intercom switch. "Oh, Tony, what can we do? He's at the pile. He can bring it to critical mass and destroy us all."

Dowd's voice said from the doorway, "Do what Talix says, Martha. Start sending the men back. The crew, not the doctors. We all know the Garland-Sosnowski technique. We learned a lot from treating your father, enough to restore Rowe in minutes. One thing is certain: only Talix can infect us. Those whom he infects become amnesic, certainly, but do not appear to spread the contagion to others. Gentry faced Rowe without attempting therapy first; he felt no reaction at all!

"Counting you, there are fourteen doctors and none of us amnesic. We must confront Talix *en masse*; it's our only hope!"

"I'm afraid, Pete—"

"We've got to do it, Martha."

She turned nervously to the public address and gave the orders while Montemurro released the locks. Realizing then that Talix would be concentrating on those who moved to confront him, she had the video circuit restored and activated the scanner in the ready room adjacent to the reactor.

They viewed the first few crewmen who approached Talix. Like a virulent contagion spawned in some fetid alien abyss his aberrated mind seized upon theirs, leaving them standing rapidly before him, pawns of a will working through him.

Dowd assembled the other doc-

tors, motioned for them to follow him.

"Scan us, Montemurro," he said. "When we reach the ready room, restore the lock. That will block Talix from us until we're ready. I will raise my right hand when we are ready. You will then cut out the lock again."

Montemurro nodded.

Dowd led the way along the central corridor, striding swiftly, confidence evident in his erect posture and determined face.

Suddenly—too suddenly, Martha thought!—they were in the ready room and Talix' eyes were upon them from his position by the pile and she felt the maelstrom forming in her mind again when Montemurro restored the lock which shot a sealing door between them and Talix.

Dowd grouped them into a semi-circle facing the reactor room.

"Steady now," he said. "This is the only chance we'll have."

He raised his right hand. The door flashed back.

The doctors' voices joined then in most unusual choir. Talix' eyes flashed, his face grew taut—and suddenly he was wavering, trembling, and cringing away from them, utter terror flashing on his distorted features as he screamed, "*No, not again!*"

Again?

As they intensely pursued the harsh routine, Talix flinched as though buffeted by physical blows, backing to a bulkhead, shielding his

contorted face in palsied hands and suddenly collapsing, convulsed; then abruptly becoming still, a curiously peaceful smile on his curiously relaxed features.

"Pete," Martha said, "have him taken to the Isolation room and closely watched. Have some of the other doctors restore those he infected. Call me when Talix awakes. I must get some rest before I collapse."

Mercifully it was fully sixteen hours before she was awakened with the news that Talix was conscious.

The strange luster was gone from Talix' eyes.

"Martha!" He came forward, arms outstretched. "It's been a long time!"

"Hello, Chet. You're looking fine—" She curbed the "now" on her lips.

"And you're still the most gorgeous girl who ever graced the Starship's corridors," he responded warmly.

"Chet, why have you disclaimed knowing Pat?"

"Pat?" His perplexity seemed honest.

"Pat D'Agostino." Her eyes plumbed his anxiously.

"I'm sorry. There may have been a man named Pat D'Agostino but I don't recall him."

Be patient, she told herself. *He couldn't even speak Pat's name before!*

She felt from the vagueness of

his eyes that he was plumbing his memory for the name now strange to him, seeking association—

When they questioned him under deep hypnosis, they extracted much which he did not consciously recall, but the fragmentary nature of their findings only served to bolster their conviction that the expedition's members had spent most of their sojourn on Barnard One under somnambulistic hypnosis.

His mind insisted the nobles were friendly and cooperative. It yielded no supporting data.

It indicated that the city and related artifacts had been ultramodernistic, with an intricate network of rolling roads, with servo mechanisms for preparing food and drink—but all of which the natives shunned.

There were vehicles abandoned and rusting on superhighways long unused—highways which Talix' memory strangely said led nowhere. It said that educated guesses made by the expedition's engineers indicated that mechanisms with a useful life of 20 years—with proper maintenance—were falling apart.

The nobles had learned English easily and apparently through linguistic, not telepathic ability.

Despite their apparent neglect of their own past scientific achievements, the nobles' interest in solar science was insatiable.

His mind said the natives were humanoid, which would imply both male and female sexes, yet it paradoxically stated no women had been

seen and no males under 20 years of age—

Twenty—twice!

As Talix was coming out of hypnosis he burst, "The portrait! They had it enshrined in the audience chamber. It showed a lovely woman's face, a grieving alien Mona Lisa—"

He was conscious, exhausted.

Twenty twice, Martha thought, *and a mourning Mona Lisa!*

When Talix was rested, therapy was resumed, but nothing more was gleaned from Talix' mind—nothing ever of a missing friend named D'Agostino.

Meanwhile the doctors unceasingly practiced hypnotherapy in groups upon one, remembering Talix' outburst "*No, not again!*" which he had not been able to explain, endeavoring to develop immunity against any form of auto-suggestion which might be group-imposed.

Martha sought a partial answer in electronics, causing the technicians to build tiny transceivers which would consolidate their voices and auditory senses into one as they voiced the planned routine.

They must be a gestalt, a single, indomitable Will.

And the tape ran through. The Starship burst into normal space-time. They felt the gravitational field of Barnard One gently twisting the ship's trajectory.

Orbiting pole-to-pole, they probed the planet's surface with electrontelescopes.

There *was* but one city, located near the equator of one of the two huge continents, casting long shadows now at dawning, spelling high towers.

But there *had* been others. There had been interconnecting highways. There had been bridges flung across vast chasms.

The cities were leveled ruins, the highways cracked ribbons, the bridges sagging, twisted strands.

Evidence of what? International warfare? Invasion from without?

Or something else?

Martha sought an answer in Talix' disclosures, in the things now observed.

A friendly, cooperative race—reject that.

Substitute: a covetous, secretive, grasping race.

Add: apparent loss or deliberate rejection of their own science.

Add: insatiable thirst for knowledge of another tongue, of another science.

Add: a towering but neglected and decaying metropolis.

Add: an agricultural anthropology.

Add: a hundred toppled cities.

Add: humanoids—but call them men only, for of women there are none.

Add: twenty twice and a mourning Mona Lisa.

And add a man named D'Agostino.

Add them all and equate nothing.

It was twelve hours since their

transition from hyper-space. Barnard One was a great hypnotic eye with swiftly lowering lid spinning into night. Then, with a suddenness which robbed Martha of breath, the intercom heterodyned and burst:

"Radar to all personnel: unidentified object climbing from surface!"

It would be—it *had* to be—the missing scoutship, coming to rendezvous as Martha had been sure it would.

She turned to Dowd.

"We're not ready, Pete," she said in momentary helplessness.

"We *are* ready, Martha," he responded curtly. "We have to be. It's better than first facing them in their own habitat, probably many of them. Here we've a definite advantage. They probably expect the Starship to have returned empty on automatics. There can't be more than ten of them aboard that ship. With proper airlock manipulation, we can allow only two to inship at once. Surely we can face *two* of them!"

"We certainly can, Pete!" she cried, infected by his confidence.

Quickly she summoned the doctors to the lock corridor, ordering mechanical hypnotherapeutic equipments set up, transceivers checked out.

Visual Observation verified that the approaching object was the missing scout.

Martha stood in the midst of the semi-circle of men facing the inner lock as the scoutship homed in with contact clang of hulls.

Her right hand trembled on the tiny remote keyer; then steadied and resolutely activated both lock and hypnosis equipments.

Her eyes fixed fascinatedly on the opening lock, her mind cried, *Oh, dear God! let it be Pat!* and feared it would not be.

It was not.

Two men quickly emerged, somberly-robed, undoubtedly nobles of Barnard One. They looked apprehensively behind them; then cursorily at the waiting group. Their eyes darted as though seeking a route of escape.

Martha sensed a deep sadness in them. She forgot then to activate the lock's closing mechanism and would have forgotten to begin the planned routine had not her colleagues chanted, "You have taken one of Sol, a man named D'Agostino—"

The chant, electronically magnified, welded her consciousness to her companions.

One noble faced abruptly right, the other left. They swept their suddenly lustrous eyes like paralyzing whips from the outer fringes of her companions toward the semicircle's center where she stood.

She stood alone then before the nobles' concentrated gaze, whispering goodbye to her fondest memory.

Their eyes were suddenly anguished, their faces flooding with mixed sorrow and adoration. They prostrated themselves before her, faces hidden in trembling hands, writhing in paroxysms of grief.

She looked down upon them, utterly alone, utterly bewildered, looked up again and found her loneliness gone forever.

Patrick D'Agostino faced her from the lock.

She was in his arms then, sobbing happily, relievedly, conscious only of his deep voice, of his close embrace.

"I knew somehow *you* would come," he said.

"Oh, Pat," she babbled. "I'm so glad you're all right. Where have you been? What have you done? What will we do now?"

"Easy, girl!" he said. "I've been okay. They held me prisoner until the Starship left. Then—but I've got to explain them first!

"They've a psychic imbalance, Martha. They reject through completely involuntary self-hypnosis everything they will not or dare not face!

"The motivating reasons go far back. They were practiced hypnotists before their cataclysm twenty years ago. Their culture was deteriorating through conflicting persuasions. Their leaders knew they had to find a new frontier before increasing repressions turned all their minds into a psychic racial womb.

"Their science was great, greater than our own from the breakdown remnants I've seen. They discovered interstellar flight and sent a starship out, hoping to ease international tensions through finding habitable planets of other stars.

"They vainly searched three other star systems; then turned to dimmer Sol. They were exploring inward world by world when they received an urgent message that war was imminent here.

"They returned too late. Their supreme weapon had been accidentally activated. Their only shielded city had been devoted to scientific research. Their women were never allowed to study science; they were all outside the shield.

"My informant accused the nobles of their negligence. They could not face their guilt. Through self-hypnosis they rejected their accuser, their science and almost all their past.

"Our coming introduced a catalyst. They hungrily embraced *our* language and science. They hoped to reach out through our achievements to another race than ours which would not inquire into their past as we have done, another race which would welcome them as superior, whose women would feel privileged to bear their children.

"Later I found out why they grasped some things so quickly; they had known them before and rejected them.

"When they brought me into their audience chamber after the Starship had gone, I accused them so bitterly of their planned theft that they promptly rejected both their plan and me!

"You can see them for what they are. Look at these two I forced to come with me, almost complete in-

troverts with me an invisible demon goading them!"

She had been lulled into an almost hypnotic trance by his resonant voice. Now the full import of his words came to her, interwoven with Talix' disclosures.

. . . turned to dimmer Sol . . . twenty years . . . My informant accused the nobles . . . they grasped some things so quickly . . . known before . . . twenty—and a mourning Mona Lisa . . .

"Pat!" she screamed with sudden, joyful intuition, "do you mean—"

Her wet eyes searched his smiling face.

"Yes," he said gently. "Your father's hunch was right; your mother didn't die. They rescued her—sole survivor of the torchship she'd been on. They learned our language from her only to reject both the language and her.

"She's waiting in the city. I couldn't bring her until I'd investigated the ship.

"Nearly twenty Earth years ago, she had tried through her small knowledge of psychiatry to cure these miserable men. She almost succeeded with a sensitive artist who thought he envisioned her in a dream and so painted her. The portrait is in their principal audience chamber, the sole object of their worship.

"Until the painting was made, they had been almost completely apathetic. It restored their libido prompted them to adopt our tongue and to steal our science—until I repressed them again.

"We must cure their repressions. We need them, their past, their submerged memories. Their science, recalled and coupled with ours, can take us much, much farther Out. They can certainly have a future now, Martha. They're handsome. They're human. And there are lonely women on many worlds.

"They'll listen to you. You're the image of your mother twenty years ago; the living embodiment of the portrait, their only constant dream.

"Be the goddess you truly are. Forgive them—but order them to restore the others. Do it now, Martha. I'm sure your mother is becoming rather impatient down there!"

She turned from Patrick D'Agostino then, a goddess resolutely facing those who had forgotten.

Certain she could teach all men remembrance.

Certain they would not forget again.

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CITY, ZONE, STATE _____

letter from tomorrow

by . . . Lee Correy

Maybe the man was nutty as a fruitcake. Maybe he thought he was a little green man—and maybe he was very sane...

JUST as Matt Thayer was about to tackle the stability computations for the next Aphrodite sounding rocket, the yeoman arrived with the mail. Matt glanced at the letters which landed in his *IN* basket and, sighing as he looked at the clock, realized he wouldn't even get to first base computing *C-sub-m-alpha* before quitting time. So he reached out and pulled in a handful of letters.

"Lots of fan mail today, Mr. Thayer," the sailor told him with a grin.

Matt made a nasty noise. In a moment of weakness, he'd let himself be talked into helping answer—if he could—some of the "fan mail" which continually poured into White Sands—letters from kids with stars in their eyes, notes from people asking questions or wanting photos, and the inevitable letters from cranks, crackpots, and screwballs. Some of the worst of the latter went unanswered because there was no possible answer, and they ended up in the bulging screwball file.

He took a look at the other mail before he got into his share of the fan mail. Product magazines, prod-

Working with the planning staff at White Sands Proving Ground, rocket engineer Lee Correy participated in hundreds of rocket firings, including the record-breaking Aerobee-Hi research rockets. Well known in SF, he is also the author of considerable material on rocketry and astronautics.

uct pamphlets, poop sheets and propaganda from manufacturers, and a sexy calendar blotter which arrived monthly from an electronics distributor made up the bulk of it. He tossed the product dope into the *HOLD* basket, intending to look it over in a slack period. There was no doubt about it; rocketry and guided missiles were getting to be big business. Each month, information on thousands of new products, techniques, and processes poured into his office. The quantity of this mail plus the increasing variety of off-the-shelf hardware available never failed to amaze him. The United States was outdoing herself in developing and producing items. He had once had to chuckle over the brochure advertizing six different kinds of nuclear reactors for sale.

The public in general had no conception of that. They weren't on the direct receiving end of it. But they did know that rockets were super-spectacular things and that space travel was coming as certainly as the sun was going to rise tomorrow morning. The interest was high and getting higher all the time. That was evidenced by the continuing piles of fan mail that stacked up at White Sands.

Picking up the first letter, he noted the crudely-scrawled address, "White Sands rocket center, N. Mex." With his thumb, he tore it open.

"Dear White Sands: I am ten years old, and am going to be a

spaceman. I have been standing on my head and practising eating crackers so I can get used to living in a spaceship out where there is no gravity. Pleas could you send me some pictures of rockets and anny information you can. Sincerly yours . . ."

Matt grinned and made a note to get some prints from the photo lab and a copy of the proving ground brochure. Then he grabbed another letter.

"To whom it may concern: We have a rocket club and have built and flown ten powder rockets. They weren't very good, but we think we can do better. The Chinese could do it in 1232 A.D., and we figure we can too. So we are building a small V-2 rocket using oxygen and asetiline. Could you please tell us what is the best material to make the motor out of? How do we keep it from melting? What is the best shape for the nozzle and how big should it be? What is the best shape for the fins? How should we turn the fins to steer it, and where can we buy a gyro to stabilise it with? Please send us all the information you can, and write soon . . ."

Swallowing, Matt shoved it into his *HOLD* basket. Tomorrow he'd take it around to the propulsion group and see what they had to say about it . . . if anything. Matt shuddered. Kids, doggone them! Oxygen and acetylene was not the most powerful propellant combination, but it was still a better explosive combination than TNT.

That bunch, he decided, should get together with a high school science teacher before they lost some of their members or suffered mangled hands or sightless eyes.

When he got to the third letter, the first thing he noticed was the florid and somewhat shaky handwriting on the envelope. From some old lady stumping on some quasi-religious theme or claiming she'd been in communication with the flying saucers, Matt figured. He remembered the letter from an elderly lady, three pages of solid invective, damning their souls for building rockets that people might eventually ride in and claiming that people should "ride around in planes and trains as God had intended." At least, Matt had admitted at the time, she had enough imagination to foresee the use of the rocket as a powerplant for commercial airliners.

Fearing the worst, he tore open the third letter.

"Dear Mr. Thayer . . ."

Well! He smoothed it out on his desk top and went on.

"I read with much interest the recent paper by you in the American Rocket Society magazine dealing with a possible time-table for flight into space. I was very much impressed with your open approach to this subject which is something not possessed by many men in your field.

"Because of this, I want to tell you about several ideas which I have for the improvement of space

rockets so that when they reach an altitude of 13,500,000 feet they will be able to travel to Mars and perhaps to the stars, too. I have put a great deal of study into this, and if you would like to hear more about it please write to me. I also have several other ideas which may have escaped your attention and which will be of interest to you.

Sincerely yours,

L. Alcuin."

Matt shoved his chair back until he was chock-a-block against the wall, then he gingerly picked up the letter as though it were saturated with the Black Plague.

"*Whew!*" he whistled aloud. "They get whackier every day! I'll bet this guy has more screws loose than our launcher." But, strangely, he found himself spreading it out again for another reading as though he could not quite bring himself to believe what he had read the first time.

The stationery was cheap, and the guy didn't handle English very well, Matt decided. As a matter of fact, he couldn't even write very legibly. As for the style of writing, Matt hadn't encountered it before. Everybody, no matter how bad their penmanship, unconsciously follows the nearly-universal method taught in the schools. Even foreign scripts had their standard style, and Matt could recognize these by now.

But Matt could not recognize this style. It was a new one on him. The post-mark said it had been mailed from Childress, a medium-

sized city somewhere in the Midwest. Matt knew it from having passed through it aboard trains during his college days.

Ah, well, he thought. Answer him anyway. Matt tried to make it a practice of answering every letter, no matter how screwball it was. This one would get standard answer 2-A: the thank - you - for - writing - and - we - will - forward - to - higher - levels one. With twenty minutes left until quitting time, he walked out and dropped it on the secretary's desk.

"Give it the usual treatment, Mac. Make it look and sound pretty, but don't commit us to a damned thing." An answer, no matter how it was written or how little it said, was good public relations. It was a somewhat mercenary attitude, Matt felt, but the people who wrote in were, after all, helping to pay for all this.

Three weeks later, Matt was sitting at the same desk with a sour look on his face and an even sourer attitude ruling his mind. The Aphrodite rocket whose stability he'd computed from the contractor's original figures had gone head over teacup at about 50,000 feet on the way up as the propellants burned off and changed the rocket's center of gravity. He cursed the gods and the contractor mathematicians who'd done the original stability work from wind tunnel data.

He looked over the results of the bad flight and stared distastefully

at the contractor's book with the stability graphs in it. Matt knew what had happened. Too much payload. Center of gravity had wandered aft of the center of pressure. Low stability. In fact, instability.

He knew what he was going to have to do: make a trip back to the plant and fight it out with the pig-headed mongolian idiots the contractor must be using for mathematicians. Ten-to-one he would bet that not one of them had ever seen the rocket, much less had any idea of actual flight operations; they were probably text-book boys. He wanted to see the data they had used, and he was ready to prove to them that something was definitely awry in Denmark with their original figures.

"Troubles, troubles," he mumbled. "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity; man born of woman is born to trouble . . . as the sparks fly upward . . ." It wasn't a good quote, and he was sure it wasn't even right. But he used it often when he felt disgusted. It comforted him.

He was interrupted by the yeoman with the day's mail. "What we got today, Mose?"

"More fan mail and a pile of junk from people trying to sell you things," the yeoman told him with a grin. "The usual."

"Does it ever change?" Matt asked.

The mail was a welcome break at the moment, so he went through his opening procedure, deriving great satisfaction from throwing expen-

sive and profusely illustrated ad literature in the wastebasket. He started to sigh before getting on with the fan mail, but he noticed a letter with the strange script on it again. The return address named "L. Alcuin."

Should have let well enough alone, he thought. Skeptically, he opened it and looked it over. The writing and English had improved.

"Dear Mr. Thayer: Thank you for answering my previous letter. You may be interested in passing on the mathematical analysis which I have worked out to show that rockets, with the proper propulsion system, may switch from a reaction drive to a system using electrogravity energy once they have progressed sufficiently beyond the disturbing influence of this planet with its strong electrogravity field and Störmer current . . ."

Thereafter followed three solid pages of tensor calculus, matrix algebra, and electromagnetic field theory interspersed with a great deal of Unified Field Theory. Matt, who had minored in math in college, could follow it to some extent. But a great deal of it was far beyond his understanding.

Matt took it down to Bill Andrews, the project mathematician and ballistician. Dropping it on the other's desk, he remarked, "Read it, Bill, and tell me if this guy is talking through his hat or not."

Andrews did so. It took him about thirty minutes, during which he made copious scrawls of his own

on a pad and absent-mindedly punched a few numbers into his Friden calculator. Finally, he sat back and laughed. "Who does this guy think he is, and where did he learn his math? It's a laugh, Matt! Better frame this one for the screwball file. It's a real jim-dandy!" The mathematician was chuckling heartily.

"Balderdash, huh?"

"Worse than that. This guy doesn't know from straight up. You should see the way he handles some of his tensors! Strictly out of this world! He probably saw some of this stuff somewhere once—maybe in a text—but he doesn't know how to handle it."

"Ummm. Suppose you follow his line of reasoning the way I did without the benefit of too much math knowledge? Does it make any sort of sense? What I could follow seemed okay to me, although it was a little unorthodox."

"Sure, his logic is unshatterable," Andrews told him. "But it leads you 'way out on a limb. It all sounds pretty good, although it's screwy. He leaves out the essential things that are absolutely necessary in order for it to work. One thing really gave me a laugh, though, Matt . . ."

"What's that?" Matt wanted to know.

"He must know one hell of a lot more about geomagnetism and the Earth's gravity field than anyone else . . . or at least he thinks he does! Part of this whole deal of his is so unshakeable because there is

absolutely no way to check some of the things he says!" The mathematician tossed the letter back. "Better forget it and file it. The guy has slipped his cams. The next thing, he'll be telling you he got all this information from the little green men in the flying saucers . . . just like a lot of other crackpots . . ."

So the second letter from "L. Alcuin" went into the screwball file because Matt had other, more important things to do. But he couldn't forget it. He knew something about the history of science and technology—how sometimes a totally impossible thing becomes a reality overnight because the new theory conflicts with old theories—and nobody likes to give up old theories.

Maybe Alcuin *was* nutty as a fruit cake. But the man's logic had impressed Matt somehow. He knew that some people possessed no tact and had not the slightest knowledge of elementary psychology; in spite of being brilliant, they were looked upon as crackpots when they brazenly, knowing no better, announced their theories and concepts to the rest of the world. Einstein had been tactful as well as brilliant. In his first papers where he considered the electrodynamics of a moving body, he rung in the first overtures of the theory of relativity by carefully utilizing some aspects of Maxwell's electromagnetic theory. Einstein had proceeded gently, stepping on no one's toes and being careful not to

alienate the entrenched forces of authority. But not everyone had that facility.

And Matt, knowing that the hue and cry was for basic research and new concepts these days, had the feeling that some seemingly-screwball concepts should be followed up. True, he realized that 99% of them might turn out to be the results of wild and undisciplined imaginations.

But it was that remaining 1% that worried him—the 1% that would otherwise be lost. New concepts do not always fit with the established theory of the nature of things. More often, they are in violent disagreement which may be due to the blind alley into which orthodox thought may have strayed.

On his own, he wrote Alcuin on his personal letterhead, telling him to sit tight. He intended to investigate on his own, and no one need know about it.

When his travel request for his trip to the contractor's plant came through, he checked his annual leave and decided to take a day off. This made Mae mad; she had to retype his travel orders to allow him to take the leave and depart from his intended itinerary.

The small town of Childress was not over fifty miles from where the plant was located.

Two days later, weary from riding airliners, getting too little sleep, living in the sterility of a hotel room, trying to make his expenses

balance with his *per diem*, and tangling heads with the stubborn and persistent mathematicians, he told the world in general to go to hell and hopped the bus to Childress.

It was evening when he arrived, and he got a bite to eat in a little short-order cafe tucked in among the other buildings along the mad-denyingly-typical main street of Childress. As he was paying his bill, he dug out Alcuin's address and asked the cafe proprietor where he might find the street.

The man told him, then scowled at him as he handed Matt his change. "Are you sure you want to go down there?"

"Skid row?" Matt asked.

"Mister, we're a clean and up-standing city. But keep your eyes open. A guy was rolled pretty bad down in that neck of the woods last night."

It was the right street, and the old, two-story frame rooming house had the right number on the post supporting the veranda roof. Matt noticed the sign: "Rooms, 50 cents per night."

He fought off the temptation to turn and go back. This was the sort of a place where a person could come and go without attracting the slightest notice. But he had come this far. So he turned the old brass door bell and waited.

A frowsy, fat old lady came to the door, a tattered shawl wrapped hastily around her shoulders.

"I'm looking for Mr. Alcuin," Matt told her.

"He's in. He never goes no place nohow. Sometimes I think he don't eat . . . Say, he ain't in trouble, is he? You ain't a dick?"

Matt assured her he wasn't.

"I don't let to no rowdies, mister."

"I'm sure you don't. I'm here to see him on business."

It was evident that she was bursting with curiosity as to what the business might be, since it might provide some good gossip. But she let Matt in and directed him to the second floor. "End of the hall," she told him.

Matt thanked her profusely, mounted the ancient stairway, and climbed to the second floor. Following instructions, he walked softly down the dimly-lit hall and came up to a door.

"Come in," said a voice in unusual accents as he knocked.

The room was lit by a single 60-watt bulb hanging naked from the ceiling. Under this was a small table and a chair. Covering the table and strewn around the room were books. . . . Books, thousands of them. And paper. Paper everywhere. An old brass bed stood against the wall, and the single window had its torn shade pulled all the way down.

But Matt was looking at the man who got up from the chair beside the little table. He saw a small man, well proportioned, with a bald head. The lighting was so poor that

the man's complexion looked flat and faded. He was immediately caught and held by the man's eyes . . . strange eyes, deep and mysterious.

"Yes, I am Alcuin. And you are Matt Thayer," the small man said. His voice was strangely accented. "Sit down. I have been waiting for you."

Skeptically, Matt did so without saying a word. Alcuin looked at him and indicated the chaos of the room. "I've had a terrible time, you know. I don't speak too well yet, and my writing is even worse. The problem of communication is always a difficult one. I got nowhere for a long time. I didn't even know if I was getting through to you until you answered. Still, I'm not sure. You think I am a . . . crackpot, don't you?"

"I'm not sure what to think of you at the moment, Mr. Alcuin," Matt admitted. "I am here because I was motivated by curiosity . . ."

"I suspected as much. Men working in your field usually have a strong curiosity. You and others are working toward travel in space . . ."

Matt didn't quite know what to think of this man. Crackpot? Perhaps, he decided. But he played along, stalling for time until more information presented itself. "Space travel is still a long way off . . ."

"Perhaps not as far as you think." Alcuin sat down, still smiling. But it was a strange smile . . .

as though it was an unnatural facial expression. "Not if I can get someone to listen. You'll never know how difficult it was for me to translate my knowledge into terms you'd understand. Too many people, I know, passed me off as insane. Your concepts and knowledge have not progressed far enough yet . . ."

Matt leaned forward. "Who are you really, Alcuin?" he asked suddenly.

"Let us say that I am a castaway. This is a nice place, but it doesn't agree with me. I want to make a deal . . ."

"Eh?"

Alcuin watched him with unblinking eyes. "You have imagination and an open mind, Thayer. I saw it in your article, and it was evident in your answers to me by mail. Let's just say that I want to go home. Give me a ticket, and I will give in exchange a method for doing so." Quietly, he got up and started taking off his shirt.

Halfway through, he used his third and fourth hands to assist him with the unfamiliar buttons.

Matt Thayer had made a strange pact. As he left the dingy rooming house, a place where a man could come and go without being noticed at all, he began to wonder what he was going to do now. How could he pull it off?

How, and what, was he going to tell other men?

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